MY AFTERDREAM

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MY AFTERDREAM

MY AFTERDREAM

A Sequel

TO

THE LATE MR EDWARD BELLAMY'S

Looking Backward

BY

JULIAN WEST

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

MCM

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MY AFTERDREAM

INTRODUCTION

It is now some years since the late Mr Edward Bellamy published his well-known and successful work *Looking Backward*, a work in which are recorded, with characteristic lightness and delicacy of touch, the curious experiences of myself, Julian West. That the facts I communicated to Mr Bellamy do not embrace the whole story must often have occurred to a large proportion of the thousands of readers whose generous appreciation of his efforts was ever a source of satisfaction to my friend. And, indeed, the suspicion is a well-founded one; for the sequel, fraught as it was with a most painful episode, has, from motives which everyone will respect and sympathise with, hitherto been withheld from the public eye. The memory of

that episode having become dim with efflux of time, and the rough edges of tragedy besetting it having worn themselves away, I now resolve to take the world into my further confidence, and, since the hand of death has unhappily stricken down the chronicler to whose skill I am indebted for celebrity, to continue the narrative myself. This determination is, it must be admitted, a rash one; for my pen has but little skill, and comparison between Mr Bellamy's work and mine could be drawn only to the disadvantage of the latter.

For the assistance of any reader whose memory may require refreshing, I have thought it advisable to subjoin a brief outline of the story to which the following is a sequel. In the spring, then, of the year 1887, I was living in Boston, a wealthy young man of thirty summers engaged to be married, at an early date, to a lady named Edith Bartlett. For some time previously I had been suffering from insomnia, and to allay my malady had been accustomed to retire at night to an underground chamber, whither sounds from the outside world could not penetrate. This

precaution failing, recourse was had to a mesmerist, by whose means I was enabled to procure the sleep I so much needed. Calling in my dispenser of slumber one night, I passed into oblivion under his treatment, and when I again woke, the world as I knew it had passed away.

It was in the year A.D. 2000 that a certain Doctor Leete had set workmen digging the foundations for a laboratory he intended building close to his own house. While the excavations were in progress my underground chamber had been discovered, and the doctor had succeeded in his efforts to resuscitate me from my long trance. Besides his wife, Doctor Leete's family comprised an only daughter, Edith, who proved to be the great-granddaughter of the very lady to whom I had been betrothed. At the hands of these good people I received every possible kindness, and Doctor Leete spared neither time nor trouble in enlightening my ignorance of the wonderful new world into which I had so strangely been introduced. Ultimately a marriage was arranged between Edith Leete and myself.

During the time I had lain in the trance,

enormous social changes had taken place. Such of those changes as bear upon my narrative I will now briefly recapitulate.

I discovered that the whole of society was organised into a vast industrial army, each trade and profession having its guild, with a body of governing officials arranged in grades according to relative merit and length of service. Education was universal; it began at six years of age and lasted till the pupil was twenty-one, when he or she was mustered into the industrial army. The first three years in that army were devoted to unskilled labour; and upon their expiry the labourers passed to other employments, every effort having been made by the Administration to foster, during the educational period, any choice in the matter of a calling the pupil might evince, preference in the selection of their future career being the privilege of those who had already proved themselves possessed of most ability. Any person could change his profession until he was thirty-five; at forty-five he retired, though for ten years thereafter he was liable to be summoned in an emergency.

The hours of labour were regulated accord-

ing to the number of applicants for employment, in such a way that the disadvantages of dangerous and uncongenial work were counterbalanced by the exaction of only a short day, and conversely, an excess of volunteers for a pleasant calling was prevented by increasing the length of the daily task thereat.

The State was the only employer of labour, and the various nationalities of the world were united in a loose federation. Money was unnecessary, as every person received an annual credit-card of a certain nominal value, the same in every case. From this card the value of goods received, house rent, etc., were pricked off. The amount of this credit-card was fixed on a liberal basis so as, with economy, to leave a surplus which the recipient was at liberty to spend in any way he chose; for instance, in the publication of a book he had written. For more expensive publications, such as newspapers, it was necessary to secure subscribers whose combined subscriptions—pricked off their credit-cards — should be sufficient to ensure the State against loss in production; this condition being complied with, the State had

no power to refuse publication of any work submitted to it.

Social inequalities were thus no longer known, and as every man enjoyed a competency, incentives to theft had been removed, and crime of any kind was rare.

International commerce was conducted on the same lines as internal commerce, all disputes that might arise as to the quality of the goods exchanged being submitted for decision to a Grand International Council.

Every ward of a city had its own dining-house, one of the rooms in which was reserved for the exclusive use of each householder living in that ward. Goods were distributed from a large central store, whence they were conveyed by tubes to the various houses in the ward.

The State had for its head a president who was general-in-chief of the industrial army, through all the grades of which he must have passed. Moreover, he was eligible for election only after retirement from the army.

Justice was administered by judges whom the president appointed on the expiry of their industrial duties. Law having become

an obsolete science, there were no lawyers, and the judges were consequently without legal knowledge. An accused person, if he had committed a crime, pleaded guilty in most instances, and with this plea the case was usually at an end. If a plea of not guilty was entered, the judge appointed to try the case called to his assistance two colleagues, by each of whom one side of it was stated, and unless these two advocate-judges agreed that the verdict found was just, the case had to be tried over again. There was no jury.

Immense economies had been effected by simplification of the distributing agencies, this having set free for productive service the masses of people who would otherwise have found employment in shops and stores. The industrial army was further strengthened by the abolition of war and of domestic drudgery. By these means the world's wealth had so greatly increased that every citizen was enabled to live in comfort; he enjoyed a good education, had easy hours of work, and could retire long before his appreciation of the good things of this world had lost its edge.

Such in brief outline is the scheme as

communicated to Mr Bellamy; at least, the above are the main features of it which it will be necessary for the reader to bear in mind. And with this brief preface he is invited to follow my further adventures.

CHAPTER I

A VISIT TO THE CITY

In a mood of unspeakable happiness I went down to breakfast on the morning after that most precious of days when, almost overmastered by the presumption of the act, I had offered my heart's homage to Edith Bartlett's great-granddaughter, Doctor Leete's charming and dearly-loved child. Marvellous to me, indeed, had been the effect upon her of the announcement of my passion. Instead of giving me to know, though in the kindest and most sympathetic way, that a maiden of the Golden Age was no proper mate for me—the derelict of a semi-barbarous civilisation—instead of this, I had had the rapture of seeing a rosy flush spread over the sweet girl's face, while, with heaving breast and downcast eyes, on whose long lashes hovered a glistening tear, she had completed my happiness by letting me know that my love was returned. And yet, how

natural would it have been had she refused me! For, remember, I had but just obtained a glimpse of the new and perfect world around me, and my movements in it were as awkward as those of a yokel in a drawing-room. Indeed, I must confess that my great joy was somewhat tempered by dread lest Edith might regret her decision, when she noticed—as notice she must—the many solecisms I was bound to commit upon being called to mix with people for whose society I had enjoyed no previous training. I should, in fact, have been plunged in despair but for the hopeful assurance that the love my dearest girl had so frankly acknowledged would prove of sterner stuff than to be dissipated for reasons which, I was fully determined, should have only temporary existence.

As I entered the breakfast-room, I saw Edith, a celestial vision indeed, arranging flowers for the table. There was about her a something—for want of a proper word I will call it a radiance—that I instinctively recognised as due to the tender consciousness of loving and being beloved. She looked up at me with a roguish smile, and in a most bewitching manner blew me a kiss.

I took the little white hand in mine.

'Darling, and is that all the morning greeting a lover is allowed in the golden age?'

In an instant the eyes were cast down as she gently disengaged her hand. Evidently the Marshal Niels were troublesome to arrange that morning.

'Well?' I asked, after a pause.

'Certainly,' she replied; 'that is—if he is satisfied.'

I will not say what happened. It must suffice to ask my reader, if a man, whether *he* would have been satisfied—if a woman, whether *I* ought to have been?

'And now, Julian,' said Doctor Leete, when breakfast was over, 'if it would be agreeable, I propose this morning to take you round the city. I am sure you must be dying with impatience to get a nearer view of the great changes you tell me Boston has undergone since the latter part of the nineteenth century.'

I replied it would give me much pleasure to accompany my host.

'Before we start, however,' said the doctor, 'it will be necessary to put on anticlasts.'

'Anticlasts?' I exclaimed; 'and, please, what may they be, doctor?'

Doctor Leete looked at me in surprise. Then he answered,—

'Oh! ah!—of course—pardon me, but the question seemed such a strange one. I was forgetting that your previous journeys have been only short ones, to dinner at the Elephant, and so forth, where there happened to be no delivery-tubes in the way. This morning we shall have to thrid the mazes of the delivery-tubes.'

'Delivery-tubes!' I said in astonishment, for you must know that although Doctor Leete had explained the system of conveying goods from the central warehouse of the ward to the purchaser, I had never set eyes on the distributing apparatus.

'Yes, my dear boy, delivery-tubes,' was the answer. 'Didn't I tell you the other night about our improved method of delivering goods? Indeed, I remember now, I did tell you.'

'Certainly, doctor,' I replied, 'you were good enough to explain that matter, but—'

'But what, my dear fellow?' said Doctor Leete, somewhat hastily; doubtless I was making myself just a trifle ridiculous. 'You see the goods have to reach the houses of the purchasers. We can't rain them down

from the clouds—even we have not reached such a stage of perfection yet; neither can they be transmitted underground without being hauled out of deep shafts by the householder, though that plan was proposed some time ago, but only to be abandoned as impracticable. Our houses being, as you have seen, of all sizes, and necessarily situated at various distances from the warehouse, it follows that the tubes must cross the streets at varying heights. Some of the tubes will fortunately be above our heads; but a large number we shall have to dodge or climb over.'

All this seemed very queer to me, and I suppose my looks must have betrayed the wonder I felt, for Doctor Leete hastened to add,—

'There is nothing extraordinary in what I have just told you, if you think for a moment. People cannot traverse the streets, at least those of them where the tubes are in any number, without some protection for the head. For this reason the anticlast has been invented, which, from its original form of a rough head-guard, has been improved into the beautiful and efficient instrument I will now show you.'

He immediately returned with two helmet-like objects, each provided with a slender arm about four feet in length.

'Here they are,' he said, 'and I think this one should fit you admirably. You see, this upper part or helmet covers the frontal and lateral regions of the cranium: the arm or nozzle, as it is called, should, if the thing suits you, be exactly at the level of the nose. You will perceive it is riddled with holes for the admission of air, and, instead of being horizontal, is tilted distally, as anatomists say, so that the apex is at a slightly higher elevation than the top of the head. At the end of the nozzle there is a sort of valve capable of playing upon a soft cushion; the object of that is to minimise the effect of blows, and, I may add, is the invention of Barnwell, one of our greatest scientists. Just try the thing on—that is right; the eye-holes seem to be in the proper position, and now all you have to do is to fasten the apparatus on by means of the chain—no, not like that; the chain goes under the chin, like that. There, now let me have a look at you. I declare, Julian, it fits as if you had been measured for it. I hope it is comfortable.'

I said it did not feel very uncomfortable, and asked of what material it was made, as it seemed surprisingly light.

'Aluminium,' said the doctor. 'There is a national anticlast factory, with an annual turnout of several hundred thousand.'

'Dear me,' I observed, 'all this is very wonderful;' but happening just then to turn round, I saw myself reflected in a mirror. Of course it was atrociously rude, but for the life of me I could not restrain myself from falling into a paroxysm of laughter. Oh, that laugh! I thought it would have been fatal, and what made me worse was that Doctor Leete did not see the joke, but was all the time busy putting on his anticlast with the solemn face of a man preparing to attend his mother's funeral. For a few seconds I was literally doubled up; then, unfortunately, as I suddenly rose to relieve my aching muscles, I collided with the doctor, and my nozzle came into violent contact with his.

Great heavens! The effect of that shock I shall never forget. I had a terrible pain across the forehead, and it seemed as if my nose had been wrenched off.

'Heigh-ho! that *was* a smack!' exclaimed

my host, and he immediately unfastened his anticlast, and ran into an adjoining room, while I hastened, as fast as my unaccustomed hands would allow me, to divest myself of the cause of the trouble.

'Here, Julian,' he said, while I, thoroughly crestfallen, began muttering apologies for my *gaucherie*. 'Never mind apologies; try some of this,' he continued, handing me a box of ointment from which he had already taken a small portion. 'Rub it in, rub it in well, as I am doing; it is an infallible remedy.'

I did as directed, and to my inexpressible relief, in a few seconds the pain was gone. That the cure was as efficacious in Doctor Leete's case was proved by the sudden cessation of the grimaces he had been making.

'That is clastanodyne,' he remarked, 'one of the most valuable inventions of the age. And now, my dear boy, I am sure you will pardon my saying that the anticlast is not a thing to be played with.'

I entreated forgiveness, and promised to be more careful in future. The doctor good-humouredly put the matter by; nay, he was kind enough to observe, now that the

pain was over, that the episode was a little funny.

At length our anticlasts were adjusted, and we set off on our expedition. Just beyond Doctor Leete's house I noticed that the digging of the foundations for my host's laboratory had ceased; neither were any workmen visible.

'By-the-bye, doctor,' I said, 'work on your laboratory seems to be suspended. If you would not think me too inquisitive, I should much like to know the reason.'

'Want of means, Julian,' said my companion, smiling. 'Was such a cause ever operative in the nineteenth century, I wonder?' he added, not without a suggestion of irony in the tone.

'In the nineteenth century,' I replied, 'people who wished to build did not, as a rule, begin until they saw their way to carry the matter through.'

'That was a consequence of defective social organisation. Under our system it is impossible for a private individual to spend much in one year on a hobby. You will, perhaps, remember that each person receives an annual credit-card of a certain amount, and from this is pricked off the value of the

various goods he requires. Each man's allowance is large enough to meet all the demands of modern luxury, and, with a little care, at the end of the financial year there will be a surplus of several hundred dollars. If this surplus is not wanted, it is returned, as I told you, to swell the general fund of the nation. My last year's surplus would also have gone thither, had I not already devoted it to that excavation, in the course of which you were so fortunately rescued from your underground chamber.'

'The work will not be resumed till next year?'

'Exactly.'

'And how long will the laboratory take to build?'

'About thirty-five years—that is, if I am able to continue saving at the proposed rate; though should that be impossible, in consequence of the increasing necessities of age, another five, or perhaps ten years must elapse before the last touches are given.'

It seems a rather slow business,' I remarked.

'Doubtless; but you forget the example of quiet, steadfast perseverance it will furnish, and to a couple of generations too.

Your children and Edith's—I hope you may have a quiver-full, my dear boy—will watch, year after year, their grandfather's laboratory growing, without waste, without haste, as though ordained by the decree of some inexorable though tardy Destiny. I assure you, we consider such an experience of the utmost value as an educational factor. But there is the Elephant yonder; you have not had a good view of the dining-house before. What do you think of it?'

I looked in the indicated direction, and saw a building I can only describe as stupendous. A deep inspiration was the sole answer I could give to the inquiry.

'You are surprised at the size, I suppose,' said Doctor Leete.

'Indeed I am. What an extraordinary structure!' for instead of being constructed on the lines of an ordinary building, it was a representation on a huge scale of the animal whose name it bore. 'Why, bless my soul! I had no idea of its being like this. And where is your dining-room, pray, doctor?' I asked.

'In the left fore-leg,' gravely answered my host; 'but the whole is occupied by rooms, even the trunk, ears, tusks and tail.'

'And every house has its own dining-room there, I think you told me.'

'Quite right, I see you have an excellent memory.'

'I am afraid you will find me very inquisitive; but how many houses may there be in the ward?'

'How many houses? Let me see—just three thousand.'

'So there are three thousand rooms in the Elephant?'

'More,' was the smiling reply. 'You forget the kitchens, sculleries, pantries, storerooms, offices, and what not. Add three hundred to your estimate, and it will be approximately correct.'

'And pray,' said I, 'what is that great object to the left of the Elephant? It looks like the head of some animal poised on a long and slender neck.'

'That is the Giraffe,' replied the doctor, 'the dining-house of the next ward.'

'Then, do all the ward dining-houses take the form of some animal?'

'Yes; the object is educational.'

'In the nineteenth century,' I observed, 'wild animals were confined in houses or large cages in zoological gardens and menageries.'

'Were they really?' replied the doctor. 'Well, that is very interesting. Do you know Storiot, our great writer on the nineteenth century, conjectures that your wild animals were secured by stout ropes to the trees in your parks, his main reason being the discovery of marks on the trunks of ancient trees for which no other possible meaning was forthcoming?'

'No, does he indeed?' I said, laughing. 'What an ingenious person Storiot must be! But what do you do with your wild animals, the living ones, I mean, of course?'

Doctor Leete smiled.

'We have none. The last, a superannuated tiger, was killed in the Sunderbunds about thirteen years ago.'

'Well, the present age is to be congratulated upon that,' I replied. 'But you just now said something about education.'

'I merely observed that the dining-houses had educational value, for though they cannot enjoy the advantage of visiting zoological gardens, yet, by strolling round the city and travelling from place to place through the States, our youth get an excellent impression of the earth's recent fauna. In fact, so much value is ascribed to the system that a new

departure is announced from Baltimore, where two dining-houses, representative of more ancient animals, are in course of erection. As I have plenty of friends there, we shall doubtless some day be entertained at the *Mastodonsaurus* and the *Megatherium*.'

Meanwhile, we had been walking down the broad road in which the Elephant was situated. We now came to a side street, whereupon Doctor Leete said,—

'This is the way, Julian. Now please be very careful and do not talk much, otherwise your attention might be distracted, and a nasty knock be the result.'

I promised compliance in as cheerful a voice as I could assume, though the view of the delivery-tubes that now burst upon my sight filled me with strange dread, for there they were, tubes of all heights and sizes, some severely plain, some decorated with gargoyles, grinning apes, griffins, and other symbolical devices. I could compare the scene to nothing except a thick forest of trees without leaves or small branches.

'Now, follow me, and do exactly as I do,' said the doctor as he prepared to negotiate the first tube. This was a large one, too large in fact to jump over, and too close

to the ground to admit of its being crawled under. In a moment my host scrambled up, and, bringing his head over, set the tip of the anticlast firmly in the ground on the further side of the tube. With this as a pivot, he gracefully described a semi-circle, and alighted on his feet. He repeated the proceeding, this time over a somewhat smaller tube, and seeing that I was not following, turned round.

'Come on, Julian,' he cried. 'You saw what I did. I assure you it is as simple as A B C.'

'I am coming,' I answered, though I knew perfectly well I wasn't. In fact, I had been all the time alternately clutching at the tube for as much as I was worth, and slowly sliding back again to mother earth. The tube was so infernally slippery, and besides Doctor Leete was a good two inches taller than I, so that what seemed diversion to my host was for me a serious business indeed.

By this time some half-dozen people had collected, and, at once taking in the situation, they good-naturedly hoisted me on to the tube. I then brought my head over, as the doctor had done, and pivoting the nozzle, threw myself forward; but instead of describing a

semi-circle, owing I suppose to insufficiency of impetus, my legs flew back and fell with a horrible thwack upon the tube. To add to my distress, I couldn't disengage the nozzle from the ground. However, no sooner did Doctor Leete see what had happened, than he hastened back and extricated me from my unpleasant position.

I was frightfully bruised, and couldn't refrain from observing that I did not think much of the delivery-tube system.

'Don't say that, my dear fellow; don't say that,' replied my host. 'Wait till you have learnt your way among the tubes, and are in a position to realise the inestimable benefits they confer—your opinion will then be very different. But come now, you are over the worst tube in this street; the rest will be easier, I assure you.'

Adequately to describe my sensations during the next hour would require a *raconteur* far abler than I. I have a confused recollection of climbing, and being dragged over tubes; of receiving awful blows on the anticlast, that I was persuaded no nozzle-valve, however cunningly devised, could render anything but most painful; of squirming under tubes impossible to pass by in any

other way; of hitting unprotected parts of my person against some horrid projection, seemingly placed there to catch the traveller unawares. Even Doctor Leete did not come off scatheless; indeed, on one occasion he had to stop and rub in a liberal supply of clast-anodyne, for he was taller than I, as I have said, and being much occupied in helping and talking with me, his attention was sometimes diverted from the perils of the situation. To make matters worse, heavy rain set in, and though the continuous coverings were let down, the sidewalks were so crowded with jostling multitudes that we were forced to fare onward in the middle of the street as best we could. At length, when the rain had thoroughly soaked the ground, we reached a tube it was necessary to crawl under. My host went at this with a will, while I waited to see the effect. When he rose on the other side of the tube, the doctor was puffing vigorously, and his face had assumed the colour of a lobster. But his clothes! Really, without exaggeration, he was simply smothered in red mud from head to heel. Fortunately, by putting great restraint upon my feelings, I was able to keep a straight face.

'Bless me,' said he, on recovering breath, 'who would have thought of rain this morning, with the glass so high? Had I believed rain possible, I should have donned a heliolepidal suit.'

'You forget, doctor,' I remarked, 'you are speaking in an unknown tongue.'

'I beg your pardon. A heliolepidal suit is one made of a special material, such that when the wearer stands in warm sunshine for a few minutes, all the mud upon it curls up in flakes and drops off. But now, what do you wish to do? Shall we proceed, or turn back?'

I replied that I would rejoin him, and immediately put my promise to the performance, with what result may be imagined.

We reached the end of that street at last. On a wall at the entrance, in large red letters, was the sign N.F.L. I asked what this might mean.

'Not for ladies,' was the reply. 'You must know there are a few easier streets, and to these ladies are restricted; it would obviously not be feasible for them to attempt a passage down such a one as this.'

'Talking of ladies,' resumed my host, 'reminds me of a story I feel sure you would

like to hear. A few years back one of our scientists—I had rather not mention his name—wrote a book, a very clever book, in which he argued that the diminished height of woman, as compared with man, was a result of the delivery-tubes. He showed that the smaller the woman the less liable was she to injury, and consequent diminution of beauty, while thridding the tubes. Moreover, *petite* women would obviously move more gracefully among the tubes, thus proving more attractive to the men. For these reasons small women were the fittest, and they therefore married and transmitted their low stature to their daughters. Well, immediately after his book appeared, the author was rapturously welcomed at the yearly meeting of the Cosmic Association for the Advancement of Science, and having powerful influence at his back, was elected a Fellow of the Scientific Institute. Now comes the joke. You must know that although the delivery of goods by tube from a central store to all the houses in the ward is a modern invention, the system has such obvious advantages that nobody questioned the existence of some tubular connection between the better shops of earlier ages and

the houses of their more wealthy customers. Judge of people's surprise when, one fine day, an antiquary—at the moment I forget who it was—came upon irrefragable proof that up till the very end of the nineteenth century goods were conveyed to purchasers, not by tube, but by hand-delivery or carts!'

Doctor Leete went into fits of laughter at this reminiscence; as for me, I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks.

We had now reached a street in which there were fewer tubes, and where movement was easier in consequence. Here a large and lavishly-decorated building attracted my notice. It was, said my host, the Dustmen's Club. I started with surprise, upon which the doctor asked why I did so.

'To tell the truth,' I replied, 'I am somewhat startled, I must confess. In the nineteenth century clubs, at least on the scale of that one yonder, were restricted to gentlemen.'

'My dear Julian,' said Doctor Leete, regarding me with mild reproof, 'dustmen *are* gentlemen, if I may use a term which our high refinement and perfect social

equality have rendered no longer necessary. In your early days, people who did nothing, or, in other words, who lived on the labour of others, were said to be of gentle birth. That is now all altered, as everybody has his allotted work, and receives the same payment for it, whatever its nature. Consequently nobody now is of gentle birth, or everybody is, whichever view you like to take, since the class-distinctions upon which the claim to gentility was founded have entirely vanished.'

I observed that I had already been told about the new social arrangements, and that I ought not to have forgotten the lesson so soon.

'Never mind,' said my host; 'you cannot be expected to remember everything at first. However, *à propos* of the dustmen, strange though it may seem to you, we do not think their club-house does much credit to so important a class of the community; indeed, there is some talk of re-building it on far different lines. Their mountain-palace near Denver, I grant you, is a splendid edifice, as is their seaside retreat at Long Branch. Dustmen, indeed!—in our society they occupy a most envied position; in fact, the

late president himself is a retired general of their guild. And that reminds me, they give an At Home in a few days, and you will then have the opportunity of making some valuable acquaintances. But here we are at the Hall of Atavism.'

'The Hall of Atavism,' I repeated; 'please what is that?'

'I will ask you to guess. Look well at the figures with which the building is embellished.'

The figures referred to, which were very numerous, were those of a beautiful woman in various attitudes, each having in the right hand an evenly-balanced pair of scales whereon its gaze was intently fixed.

'If these respectable ladies had their eyes bandaged,' I replied, after a careful scrutiny, 'I should judge them to be symbolical of the administration of justice.'

'I understand what you mean,' Doctor Leete laughingly answered. 'In fact, your idea is a curious exemplification of that tendency among rude societies to confuse the objective and the subjective. Because in your early days Law was a poor sightless thing, established on a deplorably mistaken basis, you represented Justice as blind, whereas the real

blindness was in yourselves. Nevertheless, you are on the right tack; our Hall of Atavism corresponds to what in past centuries was known as a Court of Justice, though the procedure is vastly different, as I have already told you. But let us come now to the Art Gallery; we can spend a little time there, and then we must hurry back to lunch.'

After a short walk, we arrived at an edifice of stately proportions, built upon the Doric model, and standing in large and delightfully laid-out grounds.

'This is the Massachusetts Art Gallery,' said Doctor Leete, 'and I think, if you will excuse me, I will sit down on this ottoman while you stroll round, unless you too are a little fatigued.'

I said I should prefer walking, if my host would excuse me, and accordingly we separated. The first three rooms were occupied by landscapes, and here I noticed, with unfeigned pleasure, how fully had been realised the hopes of those who, in my youth, had prophesied great things of American landscape art. The work reminded me not so much of English as of French masters, of Corot and Rousseau rather than Constable

or Turner or De Wint; yet it was marked with a sentiment and technique essentially peculiar. I then passed on to the figures, my attention being at once arrested by a large picture bearing the title, 'Arrival of the Grand International Council at Boston, A.D. 1995.' The scene, which was a very animated one, represented a fleet of some ten large passenger-laden steamships entering the harbour. Every coign of vantage was occupied by cheering multitudes dressed in picturesque costumes, while the flags of all nations floated from innumerable staffs, the whole giving an impression of gorgeous colour that was quite startling. In another picture called 'Music,' a party of friends was depicted listening with rapt attention to the strains of some sonata or prelude apparently communicated by telephone, for there was no performer present. But I will not weary the reader with a full account of the contents of the gallery; suffice it to say that, about an hour after leaving Doctor Leete, I had planted myself before a work labelled 'Muster Day,' and was wondering what it could mean, when I felt a tap on the shoulder, and, turning round, saw the doctor at my side.

'Muster Day,' I was repeating half aloud. 'Let me see, what is that?'

'It is so called,' said my host, 'because those who have reached the age of twenty-one are on that day mustered for service in the industrial army—'

'Oh! yes, I remember now,' I hastily interrupted; 'and those whose age is forty-five are released on that day.'

'Exactly,' said Doctor Leete; 'and that work of Chisholm's you are looking at is generally admired; indeed, most people think it his masterpiece. Chisholm, although a good, is by no means a fertile, artist; hence his pictures are the more valued when they do appear. By-the-bye, Chisholm lives close to us, and I will take an early opportunity of introducing you; he is excellent company. But I fear we must be starting now, otherwise we shall be late for lunch.'

We returned by an easier though somewhat roundabout route, and in due time drew near our destination. A few steps from my host's home, a building was pointed out to me on which was the inscription, 'Cock-Robin School.' I asked what was taught there.

'That is rather a long story,' said Doctor

Leete, taking out his latch-key. 'However, poor old Mrs Mauser is to be buried this afternoon, and if you care to come with me—as a spectator, of course—you will be able to judge of our funeral arrangements, and we can afterwards call at the Cock-Robin School. The latter, as you will find, stands in direct relation to the former.

CHAPTER II

MRS MAUSER'S FUNERAL, WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE COCK-ROBIN SCHOOL

Of course, our clothes were in a terrible mess, and it was necessary to change them before we could appear at lunch. I was about to strip, at the same time wondering how, since domestic service had become obsolete, my unfortunate tweeds would ever be presentable again, when Doctor Leete tapped at my door, and entered with some garments in his hand.

'As we are going out this afternoon, Julian,' said he, 'and shall not have time after lunch, you had better try on this suit now; it is of heliolepidal material.'

I thanked my host, and proceeded to do as he had suggested. In a few minutes he returned to see if the things fitted me.

Now I have already said that Doctor Leete was taller than I by a couple of inches,

while in the matter of chest-measurement and girth he was greatly my superior. Consequently the clothes I had just donned were scarcely a Piccadilly fit, and, to judge from the smile that played over the doctor's face, my appearance must have been somewhat grotesque. After a cursory inspection, my host went to the staircase, and calling over the balusters, asked Mrs Leete to come up. As that worthy lady entered the room, her face also broke into a sunny smile.

The doctor hastily explained the situation, and asked his wife's advice.

'I don't quite know, dear, what it would be best to do,' said the lady. 'Must the suit be heliolepidal?'

'Certainly, my dear. Julian and I are going to follow Mrs Mauser's funeral this afternoon, and we don't want a repetition of the morning's disagreeable experience.'

'I think I have it,' said Mrs Leete, after a pause. 'The trousers can be tucked up; that will be an advantage, considering how wet it is underfoot; and as for the coat, could you lay your hand, dear, on that pile of *Elephant Ward Gazettes?* I think it is lying under the right-hand seat in the music-room.'

Doctor Leete disappeared, soon to return with a large parcel of newspapers.

'There, now,' said Mrs Leete, 'if we both set to work and tuck the papers in, we shall soon make a good job of it.'

How energetically they laboured at their self-imposed task, those dear people! Indeed, so powerfully did their kindness appeal to me, that I felt myself wondering whether, in the nineteenth century, a host and hostess would have joined forces in the effort to make their guest presentable in borrowed clothes by cramming newspapers into all possible spaces caused by deficiencies in his person.

At last, when I felt myself swollen out to unconscionable proportions, the result was pronounced satisfactory, and we descended to lunch. Edith received me with open-eyed astonishment; but, on Mrs Leete explaining the circumstances, she burst into a laugh so brimming over with enjoyment that I felt the discomfort I was suffering to be already more than recompensed.

'Oh, father, father,' she at length exclaimed, 'it was too bad of you to take poor Julian down those horrid N.F.L. avenues, and his first experience with an anticlast, too! Poor

fellow!' she playfully added, beaming upon me, 'I won't trust the naughty man again with you, unless he promises reformation.'

'I can promise, Edith,' said the doctor, with a twinkle in his eye, 'but I fear it will be but a pie-crust sort of pledge, as I think it better for Julian at once to begin learning his way about, otherwise he might not succeed in finding the church when a certain interesting event happens.'

Edith blushed divinely, and, to relieve her embarrassment, I began hurriedly talking about anticlasts. After a time, Doctor Leete joined in the conversation.

'It is really wonderful,' he remarked, 'to study the effect of habit upon the race. I consider myself a fair performer with the anticlast, and my wife is too; but Edith is much cleverer than either of us. Now my poor father died from concussion of the brain brought about by contact with a delivery-tube; and, indeed, he was always getting injured in the streets before that fatal accident befel him. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon I am alluding to has become so patent of recent years that Barnwell has emitted the conjecture of a sixth sense—he calls it the anticlastic sense—as in process

of evolution among mankind; and he supposes the sense in question will one day be so perfect as to render appreciable the presence of an obstruction, unaided by eyesight, of course, at a distance of several score yards.'

Here a bell somewhere in the neighbourhood began tolling solemnly.

'We must be off, Julian,' said Doctor Leete, rising. 'I am sure the ladies will excuse us.'

After making our way down two or three streets, we turned a corner and came in full view of the funeral procession. I was at once struck by the large concourse of people the function had called together, all of them habited in black, except a few who, like ourselves, were evidently there merely as spectators. Naturally, I understood how it was that neither funeral car nor carriages for the mourners had been provided, the delivery-tubes rendering their use impossible. I observed how the coffin was carried by eight stalwart bearers, whose work the tubes rendered all the more arduous, though I conjectured, as indeed Doctor Leete afterwards told me was the case, that the route selected for funerals was always such as to

impose the minimum of labour upon those officiating at them. But what I did not comprehend was the reason why so many persons should accompany the remains, and I turned to the doctor for enlightenment.

'No,' said he in a whisper, 'you are right; they are not all mourners, of course. That small phalanx of people with black and white scarves walking behind the coffin are the mourners. We will follow them as far as the beginning of the open country, and then I will explain the system to you.'

And now, to my surprise, the coffin was laid on a tube, and eight fresh men advanced to take the place of those who had hitherto acted as bearers. The latter, moreover, after standing with bowed heads till the remains were under weigh, immediately disappeared. I observed that each of these released officials had the number 23 in his cap, whereas on the cap of each man of the new set were the figures 24; moreover, all the people in the crowd, except mourners and onlookers, were distinguished by some number on the cap.

To increase my wonderment, after advancing some eighty or a hundred yards, a fresh set of bearers came forward, and the number 24's, after paying obeisance to the remains,

left the procession, which, instead of growing smaller by the defection, was kept at its normal proportions by the arrival of a fresh party of eight. In all, I should judge there were several score of these people all waiting their turn to take part in the mournful rite.

Truly it was an astonishing sight. The anticlasts of all, whether mourners or assistants, were painted in stripes of black and white, and, but for the solemnity of the occasion, the dexterity with which they were used in negotiating the tubes would have savoured of an acrobatic performance. One moment the coffin would be resting on a tube, sustained in position by two bearers, while the rest, on pivoted anticlasts, were describing graceful semi-circles; directly afterwards the band of mourners would be whirling round, to be followed by the unemployed assistants in due order. Then the bearers, lying full length on the ground, would be pushing their burden under a tube, their emergence from the obstruction being the signal for the mourners to imitate their example. After this there would be a change of bearers, and the procession would move forward a few yards without impediment, whereupon the evolutions would again com-

mence. Absolute quiet was maintained, except for the noise all the crawling and leaping and twirling necessarily caused.

Doctor Leete followed on among the spectators, and I did my best to keep up with the *cortége*. Every now and again I remarked that the people in my neighbourhood were looking at me with surprised countenances, and there would be furtive whisperings, accompanied by glances in my direction. I was soon, therefore, painfully conscious of being an object of general notice, though I failed to understand what was amiss until, happening to look back, I was mortified on discovering that, in the course of my gymnastic performances, I had been periodically shedding *Elephant Ward Gazettes*, and I therefore concluded that those worthy people, who doubtless by this time knew me as that vagrant from the nineteenth century whose arrival had excited so much interest and wonder—those worthy people, I say, evidently thought this scattering of the fourth estate to be an ancient token of respect for departed persons. But supposing, I went on to surmise, instead of testifying respect, the action were regarded in the opposite light? or, oh! horror, what if they

should consider it a case of lunacy? Filled with agitation I nervously pressed forward, and in the act of springing over a tube just in advance of Doctor Leete, I alighted so awkwardly as to cause my host to swerve suddenly, and his head striking with a terrible thud against a neighbouring tube, he fell heavily to the ground.

Trembling with agitation, I untied my host's anticlast, and placed my hand upon his heart, for he remained perfectly motionless, and I feared something serious must have happened. However, after a minute or two's suspense, he opened his eyes and feebly moaned 'in the left trouser pocket.' I at once searched there, and brought out a box of ointment. The contents of this I rubbed into the injured head, and in a short time, to my great joy, the doctor was as well as ever.

My apologies were accepted with characteristic good-nature, and poising himself on a convenient tube, my host remarked,—

'Well, Julian, before we rejoin the funeral, I shall be happy to answer any question you may wish to ask.'

I answered that the grief of the bearers—with this I had been particularly struck, it

was so evidently unfeigned—seemed strange to me. I explained how, in my early days, undertakers' men were a most jovial set of fellows, and when their wages were raised, instead of earning them like men and becoming pictures of misery, in most cases the only effect of extra payment was to lend a fillip to their jollity. Bearing this in mind, I owned it appeared to me that human nature must have changed, because, though the assistants I had that day seen were paid as well as any member of the dignified professions, yet each had performed his part in a way calculated to cast a gloom over the most light-hearted of mortals.

'My dear boy,' said Doctor Leete, 'that is only another instance of the low state of civilisation in those terrible times. Nowadays, the education of our funeral assistants is so carefully attended to, that their behaviour when on duty follows as naturally, from their training, as the flight of an arrow from the drawing of the bow. What wonder is it if minds carefully grounded in moral and social philosophy, and whose enthusiasm for humanity has been fanned until it glows with threefold ardour, what wonder if the pathetic function of conveying the poor

relics of mortality to their last resting-place is accompanied by those feelings of which tears are the outward and visible sign?'

I expressed admiration for the assistants, adding a hope that I should some day make friends among them.

'A very worthy ambition that,' said Doctor Leete, 'but we must be going; the procession is already nearly out of sight.'

The reader will easily understand how fatigued I felt when, after making strenuous efforts, we at length rejoined the procession. And here must be mentioned a fact hitherto passed over in silence, namely, that from time to time an assistant would touch one of the annunciators fixed at intervals in the walls of the street. When this happened the street was instantly filled with faultlessly-played funereal music. Now it would be the 'Dead March in Saul;' afterwards the strains of that sublime creation of Beethoven would be heard; then Chopin's simpler and more pathetic lament would give way to a magnificent elegy, which Doctor Leete told me was the work of Bielacheniakowski, a Pole, the master musician of the twentieth century.

At last, when I was on the verge of ex-

haustion, to my intense relief the open country came in sight. Here was a funeral car accompanied by a goodly sprinkling of mourning coaches and a crowd of assistants, while on a slightly-raised knoll stood a party of ladies dressed in pale grey, each with a broad Cambridge blue sash across her shoulder. As the procession debouched, way was respectfully made for it, and, the coffin being lowered to the ground, a low word of command was passed round, and all those who had accompanied the remains through the streets silently drew themselves up in long lines, fronting the now brilliantly shining sun. Doctor Leete motioned to me to follow their example, and with a great effort I managed to stand up beside him. Exhausted though I was, yet I could not repress my curiosity as to the meaning of this last movement, and fortunately an explanation was soon forthcoming, for in a minute or so the mud on our clothes began to crack in various places; then the cracks enlarged and the mud curled up in flakes. A continuous patter now resounded all down the long lines; this was caused by the fall of mud-flakes from the sunward side of our garments. We then turned round, and

the process was repeated on the other side.

And now ensued a general movement to the coaches, and the *cortége* at once started forward, the ladies in blue sashes bringing up the rear. My host and I stood watching for some time, and I saw repeated what had before seemed so strange, for after proceeding some distance the procession stopped, and the assistants on actual duty were changed, the drivers getting down from their perches, and, together with those who had been walking beside car and coaches, detaching themselves from the crowd. As before, the number of unemployed assistants was still kept up, their ranks being recruited by small bands of men, who emerged from clusters of houses opposite the stopping-places. Still on the procession fared, and I, my brain in a whirl and my legs trembling under me, stood gazing at the extraordinary scene with feelings akin to stupefaction. But the events of the morning, and now this strange funeral, were too much for my overwrought nerves.

I felt myself about to fall, but clutching at the doctor, and so saving myself, I sank down upon a log fortunately at hand.

'Oh, doctor, doctor,' I gasped, 'what does it all mean?'

Without speaking, Doctor Leete took a flask from his pocket, and poured some of its contents down my throat, and in five minutes, such was the wonderful efficacy of the remedy, I was feeling as well as ever.

'You were somewhat over-taxed,' said the doctor, kindly. 'Doubtless that scurry after my accident was the cause, and I blame myself for remaining talking with you so long. However, I suppose we had better turn back now, as you will probably be glad to get home.'

I said I felt perfectly well, thanks to the pick-me-up so opportunely administered, and reminded my host of his promise to explain the afternoon's scene, begging him to keep the promise then and there, as I was most anxious for information.

'Since you wish it then, my dear boy,' said the doctor, 'I will satisfy your curiosity, though the wonder you feel is inexplicable to me, for what you have just been witnessing is the inevitable outcome of our social system. You will remember that our trades are manned, if I may so say, by volunteers, and in order to induce volunteering for all trades,

the hours of labour are adjusted so that, the more arduous and disagreeable the calling, the shorter are the hours of work at it. I also told you that if, to encourage volunteering for specially unpalatable employments, the day's work had to be reduced to a few minutes, such reduction would be made.[1] I put the case hypothetically, it is true, and that may be the reason of your failure to grasp the meaning of this afternoon's function. I have now to tell you that, owing to lack of volunteers for burial duties, that reduction has actually come to pass in the undertaking profession. With this explanation let us see how the matter works out.

'The average distance of houses in the city from the open country is three miles. The task of carrying the coffin and avoiding the delivery-tubes is—quite apart from the depressing circumstances of the case—so arduous that bearers are required to work only five minutes per diem; and even with this excessively short working-day, volunteering is not so brisk as might be desired. Now the rate at which the funeral moves is calculated at twenty yards per minute—that is, in the delivery-tube region;

[1] This is mentioned in *Looking Backward*.

consequently each set of eight bearers carries the coffin a hundred yards. Hence 8 times 176, that is 1408, bearers are required per mile, and 3 times that number, or 4224, to carry the remains from the house to the open country. For sanitary reasons our cemetery sites are chosen far away from the cities — the Boston general cemetery lying four and a half miles in the open country. Here, however, where the labour is lighter, the extra-mural funeral assistants work for fifteen minutes. The total number of assistants required this afternoon, with six mourning coaches in attendance, is, therefore, as follows. In the open country, every fifteen minutes twenty-three fresh assistants replace as many who have just performed their day's work. Of these twenty-three one drives the hearse and six the coaches; four walk beside the hearse and twelve beside the coaches, one on either side of each coach. The procession travels at three miles per hour, and therefore takes an hour and a half to reach its destination. Thus 6 times 23, or 138, assistants are required for this part of the journey. In all, therefore, 4362 assistants will have taken part in the sad procession,

from its departure till its arrival at the cemetery. The return, of course, is quicker, though I am well within the mark when I say that some five thousand persons will have borne their share in to-day's ceremony.'

'Five thousand persons!' I thought in wonderment. Then I told Doctor Leete that in my early days ten would have sufficed for the whole thing.

'I do not doubt it,' replied my host, gravely. 'Poor helots! what abysses of misery welter before the mind's eye at the sound of those words — the nineteenth century!'

'And who was Mrs Mauser?' I asked, as we were on our way back. 'And what were those ladies, so prettily dressed in pale blue and grey, doing in the procession?'

'Poor Mrs Mauser, in her working days, was a member of the ladies' branch of the emergency guild, in which she worthily performed the onerous duties of charing. The ladies were a deputation from the guild sent to do honour to the obsequies. And now we will just look in at the Cock-Robin School, after which we must hurry back to dress for dinner.'

The Cock-Robin School seemed to me,

perhaps, the most curious of the many singular things I had hitherto been privileged to behold. Imagine a large building enclosing some quarter of an acre of ground in which boys, whose ages apparently ranged from eight to twelve, were busily employed, some digging holes, others filling in holes already made, others again, in parties of eight, solemnly carrying large trays on each of which was a gigantic representation of the common robin of Europe. An intellectual-looking person in a red uniform superintended these operations. The little bearers moved forward in rhythm to a touching air wherewith the building was somehow filled, while they chanted in chorus the following refrain :—

'Cock Robin, O Cock Robin, we bear him to his rest;
And nevermore that eye will shine or heave that ruddy breast.
For ever and for ever in the cold earth must he lie,
Beneath the warden stars and clasp of azure sky.

'Cock Robin, O Cock Robin, life's joys are past, I ween;
The glad wing's zest, the cozy nest, the eggs of speckled sheen.
And chilling winds and summer suns are nothing now to thee;
Heigh-ho for pretty Robin, then, with threnody.'

Doctor Leete beckoned to the superintendent, and after introducing me, said,—

'Perhaps, Mr Sapsea, you will kindly explain the *raison d'être* of the school. I warrant, Mr West, with his nineteenth-century notions, is thoroughly perplexed at what he sees going on here.'

I remarked I had not the remotest idea what the school meant, and said I should be much obliged if Mr Sapsea would dispel my ignorance.

'You must know then, Mr West,' said the superintendent, 'that, in spite of the sedulous manner in which the idea of the grandeur of human service is inculcated in our schools and colleges, the undertaking profession is by no means so popular as it should be, and so the only way to attract recruits has been gradually to reduce the hours of labour till, in the opinion of the Administration, they have come to be far too few. To meet this failure in our social scheme—for failure it is as all thoughtful men allow—the Cock-Robin School has been established. The pupils are selected from those lads who show unusual signs of tender-heartedness; and the idea is that by accustoming them from early years to practise the rites of sepulture, in future there will be a larger number of volunteers for the profession, with the necessary

result of an increase in the hours of labour, and this will, of course, effect a great saving for the community.'

'There,' said Doctor Leete, triumphantly, as we were entering his house, 'what do you think of that, Julian? Is not the Cock-Robin School an exemplification of the immense fertility in resource characteristic of the present age?'

But I was silent. My thoughts were in an inextricable tangle, and I had not yet succeeded in finding the master-clue that alone could unravel the thread.

CHAPTER III

A PRANDIAL MISADVENTURE

I WAS preparing for dinner, and had almost completed my toilet, when Doctor Leete, already dressed, came to me, and said,—

'By the way, Julian, if it would be agreeable to you, instead of dining at the Elephant to-night, we will have our dinner at home, as by so doing much valuable time will be saved. I understand, from what Edith has been telling me, that you are a connoisseur of etchings, and I should greatly like to show you my collection.'

I told the doctor etching was my pet hobby, though I disclaimed all pretension to connoisseurship in the art. I further intimated what delight it would give me to look through my host's portfolios.

'Very well then,' replied Doctor Leete, 'while you are getting ready we will fetch our dinner from the Elephant.'

I proffered my assistance, but it was courteously declined; nevertheless, on my insisting, I was permitted to join the party. In full dress we mingled with the crowd of ladies and gentlemen making for the dining-house; but, I must admit, the knowledge that Mrs Leete and Edith were to take a part in carrying the dinner home gave me a painful shock. However, I resolved, by exerting my muscles to their utmost carrying capacity, to render the ladies' share in the performance as light as possible.

On reaching the Elephant, instead of entering by the front, we went to the back of the building, where, for some little time, we stood, with a number of people engaged on the same errand, waiting till our turn to be served should arrive. Doctor Leete headed the homeward procession with the *pièce de resistance*, a haunch of mutton; while a couple of fowls, a tureen of breadsauce, and some dishes of vegetables fell to my share, Mrs Leete and Edith following in the rear with the sweets. In this order we had made considerable progress when, to my intense mortification, my foot slipped and down I came to the ground. Of course the dish-covers flew off—did anybody ever know of

a dish-cover that stuck to its duty when it got half a chance of shirking it?—and fowls, breadsauce and vegetables, the latter including some of the finest asparagus I had ever seen, were mingled in the wildest disorder. Unfortunately, in the uncertain light, my hostess, who was closely following me, stepped on to the fallen *débris*, and though by a quick movement I was able to save her, a cream and a jelly went to reinforce the disorganised mass of what, but a moment before, had been savoury food. Hearing my cry of surprise, Doctor Leete set his burden on the ground and came running back to see what was the matter. We quickly replaced the fowls on the dish—fortunately it was not broken—and, in a subdued mood, made for home. On reaching it, my host began searching his pockets for the latch-key, and when after a few seconds it was evident that he had forgotten to bring it, he turned to Mrs Leete and asked for her key.

'My dear,' said the lady, 'I left my key on the boudoir table, as I always do after sundown.'

While this colloquy was going on, I had hurriedly ascended the steps, and on Doctor Leete calling out to know whither I was

going, I answered I was about to touch the annunciator.

'What for?' asked the doctor.

'To summon a servant,' I replied.

Here my kind friends burst into a peal of laughter, in which I heartily joined.

'My dear Julian,' said the doctor when he had regained command over himself, 'when shall we get you to understand that this is the Golden Age? Servant indeed! ha! ha! ha!' and he went off again. 'I declare this is as good as one of Jobson's comedies, ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! hee! hee! hee!'

Then he turned to Edith and said,—

'Now, you little witch, you have been making fun of us ever since Julian slipped; it's no use denying it, so do not try to. Come, we want our dinner. Let me have your latch-key.'

'Indeed,' answered Edith, bursting out afresh, 'I did not bring it, father, hee! hee! hee! hee! hee!'

Here was a pretty fix! We could not go back and dine at the Elephant, as Doctor Leete had given notice of his intention to dine at home, and we had already been provided with all we were entitled to. So, after a hurried consultation, Doctor Leete decided

that it would be best to collect the remains of the feast, placing them on the doorsteps, with Mrs Leete in charge to keep off any prowling dog, while the rest of us went to reconnoitre the premises.

Arrived at the back of the house, Doctor Leete turned a screw, and instantly the whole was lit up, so that every detail was as plainly seen as if a bright sun were shining. But no way out of the dilemna presenting itself there, we tried one of the sides, and when that was illuminated, to our joy we descried a half-open window.

'It seems a good way up,' remarked the doctor, 'but if I mount on your shoulders, Julian, I think I can reach it.'

'No, no, father,' exclaimed Edith, in alarm, 'I am sure Julian is not strong enough to support you.'

'Julian, my boy,' said the doctor, 'I perceive you will have your task cut out in bringing this little nonpareil into some sort of order when she comes under your care. Now, which shall it be; will you act as buttress or shall I?'

I said I would, at the same time assuring Edith that her apprehension was groundless.

I do not know whether the reader has

ever made the trial, but if not, I can confidently inform him it is no pleasant experience for a light-weight like myself to function as stairway to a man of fourteen stone, even though the latter be your prospective father-in-law. However, as I made it a point of honour not to budge, the doctor, after a hurried inquiry which satisfied him as to my qualification for the task, at once proceeded to mount upon my shoulders with an alacrity I should hardly have thought possible in a man of his years. Luckily he did not break my collar-bone, but it required all the endurance I was capable of to prevent my crying out, so extremely unpleasant were his evolutions with my poor clavicular region for a stage. He bobbed up and bobbed down, stood upon his toes, then suddenly brought his heels down with a shock which seemed to affect every fibre in my body, and after repeating these movements until, in my exhaustion, I was about to suggest an exchange of places, he at length slid down to the ground.

'How provoking!' he exclaimed, breathing hard and mopping his face with a handkerchief, 'I all but touched the sill; indeed, another two inches would have done it.'

As he now seemed nonplussed for a suggestion, I hinted at the advisableness of getting a ladder.

'A very good idea,' said the doctor, 'though ladders are seldom seen now, as our workmen mostly use an apparatus much like what in the nineteenth century were, I believe, called stilts. However, if you will kindly accompany me, Julian, we will go to the emergency bureau and see if a ladder is to be had there.'

As we passed the front steps Mrs Leete complained of the conduct of a couple of big dogs which would insist on hanging about, evidently with felonious intentions upon the haunch of mutton. These I drove away with a well-directed stone-shot, and Mrs Leete being reassured by the presence of Edith, we started off. But our progress was very slow, as we were without anticlasts, and the delivery-tubes gave us much trouble in spite of the illumination of the streets.

On reaching the bureau, the inspector in charge inquired our business.

'Very sorry, indeed, Doctor Leete,' said the official when my host had explained our predicament; 'but it being dinner-time, there are only three emergency men on duty, and

their services have already been engaged. As for a ladder, I am not sure—oh, yes, now I remember, there is one in the storeroom, but I fear it is very heavy—teak in fact.'

Doctor Leete asked to see the ladder. It was a long one, and the inspector had not erred in calling it heavy. In fact, it was as much as the doctor and I could do to lift it; as for carrying it to the house, that was impossible.

Doctor Leete went on to the street and called to a passer-by.

'Pardon me, doctor,' answered the gentleman to my host's request for assistance. 'The fact is I have just finished my four hours at the blacksmith's forge, and my wife is expecting me. She gets terribly nervous if I do not return at the usual time, otherwise I should have been most happy to assist you.'

This was not encouraging; but the street being deserted, we returned to the bureau and began chatting with the inspector, remaining on the alert for anyone who might come our way. After about a quarter of an hour another passer-by hove in sight.

'How extremely unfortunate,' said the newcomer, 'and my respected friend Doctor Leete,

too, whom in other circumstances I should have been so pleased to oblige. However, that is impossible now, as my time of service has expired. If only this had happened ten months ago!'

'Excuse me, but do you really mean to say you are forty-five?' asked the doctor, with a critical glance at the addressee.

'Indeed I am, and to my regret I confess the fact.'

'Then, my dear sir,' said Doctor Leete, 'I must request your assistance in the capacity of emergency man. Here are we, and my wife and daughter, shut out of our house with the dinner cold upon the doorstep: if this does not justify the use of emergency labour, I should like to know what does. Indeed, without the slightest wish to be impolite, I shall have to report the matter to the General Labour Council if your services are refused; for every man, you know, is liable to be called upon to render unusual service until he is fifty-five.'

'I regret you should have misunderstood me, doctor,' replied the gentleman. 'Do I look only forty-five, think you?' Here he took off his hat. 'See this hair, sir; notice the many silvery locks in it: I may tell you

that Tompkins, the barber, says it will be quite white in two years. Alas! it was my fifty-sixth birthday I celebrated some months ago, and I was finally released from all duty last muster-day. Were I to help you, I should have to bring the matter before my guild, and you know how strict the Administration is in such cases. Good evening, gentlemen,' continued the veteran, bowing politely, 'and I earnestly hope you may find a way out of your difficulty.'

I should not like to say how long we were detained at that emergency bureau, though perhaps my anxiety to get away and, it may be added, my hunger, for by this time I was nearly famishing, led me to exaggerate the period of suspense. However, after some lapse of time, two emergency gentlemen turned up, and their services were at once secured. But that terrible ladder! In all conscience it had felt heavy enough when we attempted to lift it; but only now were we able to appreciate the arduousness of our task. To make matters worse, the streets were, by this time, crowded with people promenading after dinner, and loud were their expressions of wonderment on seeing four men, two of them in dress-suits, carry-

ing and pushing between them a long ladder at that time of night. Some were kind enough to offer advice, but their suggestions — for the most part impracticable — were politely put on one side. To this day I do not quite know how we managed the job, but it was accomplished somehow, and much to the delight of Mrs Leete and Edith.

Without delay the ladder was placed against the house, and Doctor Leete hurriedly climbed it. Here, however, an unexpected difficulty presented itself. On reaching the window, Doctor Leete carefully lowered himself until his legs were out of sight; but when, in spite of the most violent efforts, he failed to disappear, we saw that something was wrong, and on his calling out that he found it impossible to move one way or the other, an emergency gentleman went to his assistance, and with some difficulty extricated him. Nothing daunted, my host proceeded to dive in head foremost, but again without success, as immediately afterwards his legs were helplessly kicking in the air, while a half-smothered exclamation from inside told only too plainly of the dilemma he was in. Now, had I been a real product of that age, I feel sure I should have invented some

pneumatic arrangement, specially devised to meet such a case as this, having for its object the gentle expulsion of a would-be entrant whose superabundance of adipose tissue prevented ingress by way of a window. As matters stood, however, there was nothing for it but manual force, though, I assure the reader, I would rather have an interview with a boa-constrictor than repeat the experience I went through before Doctor Leete was safely deposited on *terra firma*.

As our two assistants rivalled the Doctor in *embonpoint*, it became necessary for me to try the window, and I accordingly mounted the ladder, not without a feeling of trepidation. My legs were already through when Doctor Leete called to me to be very careful, as the window was a considerable height above the floor of the room. I thanked him, and, to my inexpressible relief, found that I was thin enough for the business, and letting myself gently down, I gained the floor. But another difficulty here cropped up, for I was in total darkness, and as, in my eagerness to set matters right, I had omitted to ask Doctor Leete for directions, there seemed no alternative but to scramble up to the window, and craning over, seek the required

information. My host told me to move six paces to the left, taking care to feel my way along the wall. When six paces had been described, there was a short flight of three steps, at the bottom of which I was to move along the wall to my right hand; eleven paces therefrom I should find, at five feet from the ground, a button, which, when pressed, would instantly illuminate the whole house.

These directions I cautiously proceeded to follow. The six paces were taken, but I suppose I must have forgotten the three steps, for I suddenly found myself pitching headlong, and before 'knife' could have been said, my forehead came into contact with something—what it was I did not inquire, but it was confoundedly hard. Half-stunned, and with a splitting headache, I rose to my feet.

'This won't do,' I muttered, instinctively feeling in my pocket for matches; but as I did not succeed in finding any, I worked my way back to the window, and scrambling up, asked Doctor Leete for a box.

'A box of matches?' shouted the doctor. 'What on earth do you mean, Julian?'

'I mean matches, to be sure,' I replied;

and then, recollecting that I had not seen a match since my resuscitation, I added, 'Matches are pieces of stick with prepared heads, which, when struck on a hard substance, burst into flame.'

Doctor Leete's laugh was enough to set in motion the midriff of an Egyptian mummy, and I distinctly heard Edith's shriller cachination.

'What a very curious idea,' at length shouted the doctor, while I was hanging on like grim death to the window-sill. 'And now, I remember how Storiot somewhere instances those sticks with fiery points as an evidence of nineteenth-century barbarism. My dear fellow, nowadays, when we can get all the light we want, and infinitely more than people could command in your early time, by simply turning a screw or pressing a button, we never think of using such things as pieces of wood,' and off he went again.

I groped my way back, this time successfully descending the stairs, but only to find that I had forgotten Doctor Leete's further direction. Was it seven, or nine, or thirteen steps? And to the right or to the left? I tried all alternatives, pressing viciously against the wall wherever I thought there might be

a chance of touching the button, but without any result. I therefore returned to the window, and was about to hoist myself up with the object of making further inquiries, when, to my surprise, who should appear but Edith! Of course, I gently put my arm round her and drew her into the room.

There is a law in physics, known as the law of inverse squares, in accordance with which all bodies mutually attractive are drawn towards each other with a force such that, at the half of any given distance, the attraction is four times as great as it was before. Now my reader knows, both from Mr Bellamy's work and from these pages, how strong was the attraction between Edith Leete and myself; and seeing that the distance between us had so diminished as to be almost inappreciable, what wonder if, when she had safely reached the floor, my arm retained its position, while my darling's head fell backward till it lay nestling upon my shoulder? I suppose the law of inverse squares was responsible for what ensued. At any rate, I found it impossible to prevent my cheek touching hers; and then I discovered a delicious little pout on her lips. How, therefore, could I help approaching

mine to them till the two pairs touched? Not being a mathematician, I did not count how many times this was repeated. I only know that, when I stopped, a little hand was laid on each side of my face, and my head being drawn down, I felt that rosebud of a mouth again touching mine. Of course, it was all very wrong, with the doctor bawling himself hoarse down below, and poor Mrs Leete contending with those brutes of dogs on the doorstep; but I will not tamely submit to be hauled over the coals till any would-be critic has passed through the same ordeal. That, I may safely aver, will not occur before the lapse of a large slice of geological time, and then this poor machine will be indifferent to praise and blame alike.

But the longest search for a button by two lovers in the dark must ultimately be crowned with success if sufficiently persevered in, provided always that the button be a tangible factor. After a time, therefore, Edith gently withdrew herself from my clasp, and, pressing upon the wall, in a moment the house was brilliantly lit up. Let no one suspect us of dallying after that; in fact, Edith suddenly looked so conscious, one would have thought she had been dreaming

during those delicious minutes, and had awoke to find the dream come true. Anyway, she fled downstairs; and though I followed as closely as I could, my Atalanta fairly outpaced me, and immediately opened the door.

We lost no time in bringing in the remains of our dinner, and hastily prepared to do it justice. I shall not pretend to describe what we saw when the covers were removed; I merely remark that the haunch of mutton reminded me of nothing so much as some lofty island in the Arctic regions, the congealed gravy resembling an ice-sheet closely investing it; while the fowls—beautiful birds too—were in a sorry plight from having set up a close association with the two other branches of nature, to wit, the vegetable and the mineral; a triple alliance, indeed, seemingly far more stable than the one so often a subject of comment at the time when my trance began.

During dinner, Mrs Leete was, as usual, very sedate; and she graciously received my compliments on her pluck and perseverance in dealing with the dogs. As for Edith, I could not help wondering whether even an earthquake would have any depressing effect

upon her high spirits. The doctor was a bit cross at first, and I feel sure I should have felt cross too, but for the fact of being on a visit, and in the presence of my distracting little *fiancée*. Doctor Leete and I made somewhat ravenous inroads on the mutton, I fear; and as an apple tart was among the uninjured remnants, and apple tart, we all agreed, is nicer cold than hot, on the whole, and with the assistance of some choice Californian wine, we did not fare so badly after all. I observed Mrs Leete and Edith eating very sparingly, and have just a *leetle* suspicion that they had fallen under the temptation to sample some of the food during their weary waiting for the ladder, particularly as I seem to remember a *second* dish of sweets among the items upon the doorstep. But I throw this out as a mere conjecture, without the slightest afterthought of blame; for I know I should have done what I imagine they may have, had I been placed in their circumstances.

During the meal I was the inoffensive butt of Edith's racy humour. She poked fun at my misadventure with the fowls, which she declared ought to make me feel small ever afterwards, because if, instead of idling away

my youth, I had embraced the useful and honourable career of a waiter, as her father had done,[1] I should have mastered the art of carrying dishes without tipping them into the roadway. Then she began laughing about the latch-key episode, and suddenly exclaimed, as if the idea had just struck her,—

'But, Julian, what were you doing with *your* latch-key? I lay an instant command upon you to search your pockets; I believe you had the key with you all the time, you naughty boy.'

In vain I protested that I had no key; that, in fact, her father had forgotten his promise to let me have one. There was nothing for it but to obey the order so peremptorily given; so I felt in my pocket, and there was a key! Of course, she had slipped it in after our return, the little humbug!

On and on she went like an adorable automaton—I forget, though, whether automata ever *are* adorable, but that is neither here nor there—joking about the ladder, and the absurdity of my forcing my way into an unfamiliar and dark house without asking directions, and the matches, and the solemn

[1] This fact has already been mentioned by Mr Bellamy.

faces of the emergency men over that episode, for they had evidently taken me to be a lunatic — so, at least, she would have me believe. Then, alluding to the swelling on my forehead, she declared the fall had made me bumptious; and although I replied, shuddering at the enormity of the pun, that a blow was usually supposed to take bumptiousness out of a man, instead of imparting it to him, she coolly ignored the retort. In this way she kept me closely besieged till ignominious capitulation seemed inevitable, and I was just about to hoist the white flag, when a brilliant thought occurred to me.

'By-the-bye, Edith, dear,' I casually remarked, 'where did you get to after I had helped you down from the window?'

This was a master-stroke, absolutely Napoleonic, in fact; for Edith, flushing hotly, hurried from the room, her flight fortunately covered by Mrs Leete, who was in the act of rising at the time, and at once followed her daughter. On second thoughts, however, I considered my action a trifle treacherous, and feared lest my tormentress might be offended with me. However, the spoils of victory are to the successful, and sweet indeed were they in my case; for a couple

of minutes afterwards Edith returned with some ointment, which she gently proceeded to rub into the swelling. I do not know whether it was a case of *væ victis* with her: perhaps she was fond of smearing foreheads with ointment; or was her seeming satisfaction mere make-believe?

As it was now well past midnight, the idea of looking through my host's portfolios was perforce abandoned, and after a little desultory conversation we separated for the night.

Well, I thought, laying my head on the pillow, this has certainly been a most remarkable day; and I felt myself vaguely wondering whether living mortal had ever before passed through a time so crowded with singular events. On waking in the morning there had been the new assurance of Edith's love for me; then came that curious visit to the city, and my first acquaintance with delivery-tubes, anticlasts, the Dustmen's Club, and other wonderful things; Mrs Mauser's funeral followed, and that strange Cock-Robin School; and, as if these were not enough, the misadventure with our dinner and all its attendant troubles must needs ensue. Retired to the silence of my cham-

ber, I experienced a return of that intense feeling of loneliness that had already several times almost overwhelmed me ; for I seemed more than ever the sport of Time, a Being thrown amid surroundings whereto he could scarcely hope ever to become perfectly adapted. But I plucked up sufficient courage to banish all such unhealthy thoughts from my mind, making it dwell on the exceeding goodness of the doctor and Mrs Leete, and, above all, on the delightful charm of Edith. Then I lived again in delicious memory those few minutes in the dark house with my betrothed, after which I turned on my side and dozed off.

I never slept more soundly in my life than I did that night.

CHAPTER IV

PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE

Doctor Leete disappeared after breakfast next morning, but he soon returned, and finding me in the library, where I was reading *Enoch Arden* to Edith, he heard out the pathetic story to its end, and after an encomium on my performance, which he praised far more highly than it deserved, said,—

'I have just been over to Chisholm, the artist, whom I promised to introduce you to. He will be at liberty in a few minutes, and, if it suit your convenience, I will accompany you to the house. After the introduction I must hurry away to a meeting of my guild, but you may be completely at your ease, for Chisholm is a good fellow, and I have taken the liberty of giving him all the information about you I myself possess.'

On touching the annunciator the door was

opened by a tall, handsome man, about forty years of age, wearing a velvet coat, that distinctive badge of the craft, as I remembered, in the nineteenth century. He conducted us into a large and well-lighted studio, and, after a short conversation, Doctor Leete left us there. As he did so a pretty girl, dressed in a nurse's costume—at least it would have been called so in my early days—came forward, watch in hand, with the remark that she had been sitting two hours, and was going home.

Mr Chisholm was engaged upon a large and apparently important canvas, and when, after receiving his congratulations on my engagement, I inquired the subject, he told me it was a representation of the women's muster-day. On the one side were ranged a number of fresh-looking girls in a great variety of costumes, waiting, as I supposed, to be drafted off to their several tasks. These young people were contrasted with a group of maturer ladies who, their life's work at an end, were being dismissed to their well-earned rest. The picture was skilfully executed; but I did not fail to notice a suggestion of effort in it, and turning to the artist found the clue, as I thought,

in a certain indefinable air of weariness and depression stamped upon his features.

I remarked that I had yesterday visited the State Gallery, and had admired his celebrated picture there.

'Yes,' he replied, 'there is a lot of work in that picture; very great labour—far too much, in fact,' and he sighed.

'And that young lady who left us just now?' I queried.

'Is one of my models.'

'Pardon my curiosity,' I remarked, 'but she said something about two hours—I did not understand.'

'Has Doctor Leete explained to you the system according to which labour is regulated nowadays?' he inquired.

I replied in the affirmative.

'The explanation is simple, then. Sitting as a model being an irksome task, the Administration allows a day of only two hours in that calling.'

'In that case,' I replied, laughing heartily at the idea, 'your working-day and that of your brother-brushes ought to be a very long one.'

Without joining in the laughter Mr Chisholm gloomily replied,—

'You are perfectly right, my dear sir. Our hours are infernally long, and the Administration, I assure you, does not forget to exact its pound of flesh to the last pennyweight. Week in, week out, we have to labour for forty-eight hours, with the exception of a month's holiday in the summer or fall — in other words, eight hours per day is our *quantum*.'

'What an extraordinary idea!' I exclaimed. 'The artistic temperament must indeed have undergone a change since nineteenth-century times. Such conditions would then have been considered absolutely destructive of the finer touches of genius.'

'Now, Mr West,' said the artist, 'I wish to get at your candid opinion, for, as I understand from Doctor Leete, you have some title to speak on the subject. Have you or have you not seen evidences of so deplorable a result in the pictures in the State collection?'

In my early time civil fibbing to an artist about his work was regarded as a most lenient offence, one, indeed, it was necessary to practise sometimes if you did not wish to be set down an insufferable bear. But the question I was now to answer was put

to me with so obvious a desire to elicit my real opinion that, after honestly praising where I considered praise to be due, I confessed to having noticed signs of effort and want of initiative in the work. I hastened to observe that, as regarded landscape art, I had only here and there observed anything amiss, and that the drawing of the impressionists was free from blemish.

'Yes,' he said, 'the landscape men get on fairly well, yet even they are liable at any moment to be confronted with a riding inspector.'

'A riding inspector, Mr Chisholm? Pray have the kindness to explain,' I said.

'A riding inspector is a person who rides round to the camps where artists happen to be sketching. Each man has to notify to the authorities his address for the time being, and the inspectors go round periodically and send in reports on the work accomplished to date. As for the impressionists, they are not unduly bothered; for when you can paint a picture in a couple of hours, and half-a-dozen such are considered enough for a month, it stands to reason those fellows have plently of time for loafing, which, to legitimate artists, means, of course, gathering

ideas for subsequent studies. With us poor figure-men and with sculptors, however, it is far otherwise.'

'Surely,' I exclaimed, 'you don't mean to say an inspector comes bothering *you?*'

'Indeed, that is just what he does do. Now, Fernley, the sculptor of that splendid Proclamation of Universal Brotherhood—one of our few real masterpieces—has a knowing way with his inspector. When he hears the click of the latch-key, he gathers some marble dust from a box close at hand, and begins, to all appearance, furiously chipping until the fool has taken himself off; of course a painter cannot play such a trick as that.'

'You surprise me, Mr Chisholm,' I said. 'And pray who are these inspectors?'

'Persons volunteering for the duty, after their statutory three years' probation in some unskilled labour. Under such circumstances, men who have acquitted themselves the most satisfactorily have the preference among those volunteering for each department of labour. Now my blessing'—here he faintly smiled—'after being *dux* of his school and taking the highest honours at college, performed prodigies as a navvy; in fact, dug out the record number of cubic feet of earth per day.

These triple qualifications gave him a practical monopoly in the choice of a profession, and he claimed an art inspectorship, apparently because the calling is calculated to satisfy the ambition of a fussy brute fond of exerting his "little brief authority" over others.'

'What a very singular appearance the Golden Age begins to wear,' I remarked.

'Golden Age, indeed,' said the artist, with a scornful laugh. 'You see that man passing yonder wheeling the barrow? Poor devil! assuredly he, if anyone, has to rue living in the Golden Age, as people call it.'

'That man, Mr West,' he continued, 'if ever there was one qualified to be an art critic—though most artists believe the phenomenon has not yet made its appearance—if ever there was one, he is the man, and I only wish he were my inspector and little Rigg placed in charge of that barrow. By-the-bye, has Doctor Leete said anything to you about our system of publishing?'

I replied that it had been thoroughly explained to me.

'Well, poor Wilson, there, has an astonishingly keen eye for the weak as well as the strong points about a picture, and, moreover,

is no mean performer with the brush himself. At the outset of his career, then, he conceived the worthy ambition of producing a great work on the artists of the nineteenth century, and of all nations too. It was to have been illustrated by plates representing the most important works of each artist. Of course, before the State would begin printing the work or preparing the illustrations, it had to receive applications from a number of subscribers sufficient to ensure the venture against loss. Well, that man spent years running over the States—in fact, every dollar he could spare and all his vacations were devoted to the search for subscribers. Now, I believe, in your early time even, the Yankee was noted for his cuteness: imagine, therefore, the result in this age, when I suppose the intellectual faculties have reached a plane previously unattained—at least that is what people are always saying now—imagine the result, I say, of a man going round and trying to get subscribers for a work, and, above all, for illustrations, they have never set eyes on, not even a specimen page or type plate. Several of us did all we could; but instead of fifteen hundred subscribers at fifty dollars, he succeeded in securing only

some two hundred and fifty, and the work had to he abandoned. Consequently, a man qualified, in my opinion, to leave his mark on the age, has to remain in the position of a gardener, and as a gardener he will be mustered out of the industrial army in a few years; that is, unless he dies of a broken heart meanwhile.'

'But with those keen artistic instincts,' I said, 'why did he not join the profession?'

'He had such a bad school and college record, and when he was a waiter at the Bear or the Antelope or something, he was always breaking things. So that although he volunteered for art, he had no chance of being accepted, and he therefore took to gardening. The pathos of that has often appealed to me; there, at any rate, he can commune at peace with Nature, and be in constant relation with some of her choicest beauties.'

This story was indeed a revelation to me, and I began to wonder how it was that Doctor Leete could dwell so contentedly on the superiority of latter-day arrangements when compared with those of the nineteenth century, and I told Mr Chisholm about this.

'Dear old Doctor Leete,' he exclaimed enthusiastically, 'the very best old fellow in the city. We are told by Storiot of people in your early time who were known as *laudatores temporis acti*, and some of whom, he says, instead of being shut up in asylums, were actually promoted to posts of governorship over you. I shall describe Doctor Leete, if you will allow me to coin the phrase, as a *laudator temporis præsentis*—of course without any reflection on my old friend's sanity. Indeed, I really believe that if you could take a leap backwards and wake up to find yourself in the times of Nero or Nebuchadnezzar, with the doctor to explain the social system then existing, in his goodness of heart he would tint everything a veritable *couleur de rose*.'

'But to change the subject,' he added, while I was laughing at this sally, 'there is one question I wish to ask you on a matter with regard to which I have always had doubts as to the justice of Storiot's inference. That writer, in one of his chapters on art in England in the nineteenth century, alluding to the value of the cabalistic sign R.A. after the artist's name, concludes that, because other men of undoubted genius were not

R.A.'s, their lives must necessarily have been fraught with the greatest trial, and their deaths, when the artist was not possessed of private means, accelerated by want of nourishment. He bases his argument on the number of artists, the wealth of the community and the comparatively small amount the public could afford to spend on works of art. Now, is the inference justifiable?'

I fairly roared at this fresh instance of Storiot's cleverness, and gave a short description of an artist's life in the nineteenth century, dwelling on its encouragements, its struggles, its triumphs and its failures.

Mr Chisholm's features glowed during the recital; at length he exclaimed,—

'Say no more, Mr West, I beg of you. What a glorious life! *La lutte pour la vie;* what a grand idea! how stimulating! And then if you should fail, to know you had done your level best untrammelled by the swaddling-clothes the State persists in encumbering us with now. Ah! if I had only lived in those times! One begins to understand the pictures they painted then.'

Here he shivered, and observed it was a cold morning, a statement with which I agreed.

'Do you know why I do not turn the fire-screw?' he asked.

I said I could not conceive why.

'Simply because I cannot afford it. The working day of a model being only two hours, it is frightfully expensive to have models, and I only wish I could do without them. Moreover, one has to pay a shocking price for pigments, because the health of a workman being liable to suffer in their preparation, the hours of labour in that craft are exceedingly few. For these reasons artificial heat is a luxury I cannot afford to indulge in until winter fairly arrives.'

'Surely you receive an extra allowance for models,' I remarked.

'Not a dollar, Mr West. You see, absolute equality in remuneration of every kind of labour is the keystone of the present social system, and to favour one set of men would "bode some strange eruption in the State," to quote the bard of Avon. No, my income is precisely that of a tailor or a charwoman!'

At this point our conversation came to a sudden end, for a latch-key was inserted in the front door, and Mr Chisholm, seizing his palette, flew to the easel. He gave my

hand a rapid shake, and said in a whisper, 'Here is little Rigg; not a word, please, about my chrysochronoscepticism.' Then he turned to the picture.

I should have asked what he meant, but at that moment there entered a brisk little man, with red hair and face to match, who gave me a slight bow as he passed. I had reached the studio door, when I heard the little man say with a strong nasal accent,—

'Well, now, Chisholm, let me see what you have been doing this morning. You do not seem to be making much headway with that picture, I guess.'

Would the reader be surprised to hear that I pitied poor Chisholm?

. . . . . .

I was crossing the street on my way back to Dr Leete's, when I heard a loud tapping on the window of a neighbouring house, and on looking in the direction of the noise, I saw a gentleman running down his front garden. He held out his hand, and grasping mine heartily, said,—

'Pardon me, sir, but I believe you are Mr West, our visitor from the nineteenth century?'

I at once owned to the fact.

'And how old may you be, sir?' he inquired, with an awestruck face. Then he hastily added,—

'But I fear my question is not a polite one—in fact, say what they will, bricklaying does make a man coarse.'

I assured him I saw no rudeness in the question, and then told him I was born a hundred and forty-three years ago.

'Bless my soul,' he replied in astonishment, 'what an age! And yet you do not look a day more than thirty. Wonderful! Wonderful!'

He asked me to favour him by coming into his house, and having a short chat, a proposal to which I gladly assented.

I found the walls of this bricklayer's neat little villa covered with etchings and engravings of theatrical celebrities, and scenes from plays. The place of honour was occupied by a fine engraving of the Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare, and while I was admiring it, my new acquaintance said,—

'A very fine thing, Mr West, as you evidently perceive. That portrait cost me a whole year's savings; however, I never regretted the sacrifice.'

I remarked that the house evidently be-

longed to a man whose taste lay in the direction of the theatre.

'Indeed you are right,' he replied; 'I was born to be a play-actor. Listen to this, if it does not bore you.'

He at once assumed a dramatic posture, and began the strolling player's speech in *Hamlet*. The recitation was admirably executed, and with all the signs noted by the Danish Prince.

'There, sir, what do you think of that?' he exclaimed when he had finished. 'And instead of letting me foot the boards, the Administration force me to lay bricks!'

I said his case reminded me somewhat of Robert Burns, 'set to gauge ale firkins,' as Coleridge expresses it, and asked him how it came about that he was not on the stage.

'The old, old story, Mr West,' he sorrowfully replied. 'A bad school and college course. You must know I hate mathematics, and never could do a quadratic equation, while as for geometry, everything beyond the first few propositions in Euclid has remained an absolute *terra incognita* to me.'

I observed I did not see any necessary connection between mathematics and the stage.

'Ah, but it's the system,' he answered. 'We all go through the same mill, and those who come out on top have the preference in selecting their future calling. I cared for nothing but the drama; and as I could not take that up, there being too many candidates better qualified, as qualification goes now, in despair I volunteered for bricklaying. So all day long it is headers and stretchers and plumb-lines with me—how I hate it, though! And worse than that,' he continued with a sigh, 'I begin to fear I shall never find a wife.'

'Indeed!' I said, 'and why, pray, if the question be permissible?'

'Well, you see, being such a fool at the bricklaying, I have no chance of promotion to an overseership. Year after year, when the *Government Gazette* announces the regradings, the name of Arthur Stubbs never appears, and is not likely to. Now the ladies—God bless them, say I, for all my want of success—naturally look for a mate among those likely to be promoted, and they seldom say "yes" to one in my unfortunate position. After several rejections, one begins to feel a little sore, I can tell you.'

I condoled with him, and said I hoped the

much-desired change in his position would come at last.

'But,' I remarked, 'as what we should have called, in my early time, a working man, it seems to me your position leaves nothing to be desired. You have a trim, well-furnished villa, pictures, and a nice library. Moreover, you have your private dining-room at the Elephant, with the run of the national museums and plenty of leisure for enjoying life. Then I suppose the bricklayers possess their guild club-house, with a mountain and a seaside home, is it not so?'

He admitted all this, but observed that a hungry man could not be satisfied with a pill, let its gilding be never so skilful.

'I allow you, Mr West,' he continued, 'the present age is a paradise for mere working men, but for those with aspirations they cannot satisfy it is quite another matter. But it seems to me you should interview the genuine article, if you really wish to see the bright side of this Golden Age.'

I expressed my earnest desire to meet with such a person.

'Well, then, if you will come with me, you shall be introduced to Mr Wilkins, my next-door neighbour.'

Fortunately Mr Wilkins was at home, and after introducing me, my bricklaying friend retired, hurriedly remarking *sotto voce*, 'For Heaven's sake, do not let out that I am a chrysochronosceptic.'

Of course I could not inquire what he meant, but I made an inward note to ask Doctor Leete the meaning of that strange phrase I had twice heard used.

The house I was now in, although a comfortable one, betrayed none of those signs of refinement I had noticed elsewhere. There were neither books nor pictures, and indeed, as I afterwards learnt, not even a music-room. The proprietor received me with effusion, and, inviting me to be seated, he himself took a chair beside me; this he proceeded to tilt upon its hind legs, while he deposited his feet upon a shelf projecting from the wall.

'And what do you think of the Golden Age, Mr West?' he asked, handing me a cigar. 'Is not it a glorious time? Hurrah for the brotherhood of man! The enthusiasm for humanity, sir, positively chokes my utterance, you see.'

What I did see was that a mouthful of smoke had got into his larynx, but I refrained from telling him so.

'Yes, Mr West,' he went on, 'the enthusiasm for humanity it is that has reared this beautiful Boston of to-day upon the relics of an effete and barbarous so-called civilisation; that has given the *coup de grâce* to injustice, by placing mankind, from the navvy to the physician or the engineer, upon the same grade so far as payment for their services is concerned; that has brought to a close the wasteful and demoralising system of competition, abolished war, eliminated crime from the world, and laid the foundations of the New Jerusalem.'

Then suddenly turning to me, he asked,—

'Pray, Mr West, were there many strikes among the sewer-men in your early time?'

This was too much for me, and I burst into a laugh.

Mr Wilkins looked at me in surprise, and as soon as I regained the power of utterance I said—

'Pardon me, Mr Wilkins, but the apparent want of relevancy between your question and the noble encomium on the present age that immediately preceded it quite upset me.'

'Pray do not apologise,' he replied. 'I assure you there is no need to do so. But, really, the question is relevant, to me at

least, seeing that I am a sewer-man myself.'

'Indeed,' I answered, 'that puts a new view on the case. As for strikes among sewer-men, I really do not remember whether they complained of any grievances, but then I had not the pleasure of much acquaintance among the fraternity.'

I then went on to say that he would greatly oblige me by giving an account of his manner of spending the day.

'My day, sir,' he replied; 'it is a romance, a positive romance'; and he smacked his lips and seemed disinclined to allow the least particle of the delightful reminiscence to escape him. 'Let me see—it goes thus:—breakfast, feeding my birds, two hours in the sewers, eight hours' cock-fighting, then a capital dinner at the Elephant, a couple of cigars, grog and bed. That is my day, Mr West,' and he eyed me proudly.

Then he jumped up, saying, 'Would you like to see the birds?'

I followed him to the back of the house, mentally ejaculating, 'Eight hours' cock-fighting; what a singular enjoyment!'

'There they are,' he said, pointing to a number of runs; 'and I flatter myself they

are the finest bantams in the whole Union. All my yearly surpluses go in the purchase of the splendid fellows. In the schedule we have to fill up I call it poultry-rearing, ha! ha! ha! It's a grand sport, Mr West, a grand sport; and when I retire at forty-five, I shall be able to put in an extra two hours a day at it. From what I am told, some of the people in earlier days, dukes and millionaires and so forth, enjoyed a fairly good time; but I never heard of their having sewer-work to keep their mental balance true, and, after all, what were their poor pleasures compared with cock-fighting, I should like to know?'

'What, indeed,' I murmured, smilingly bidding farewell to my enthusiastic friend.

'Here at least is one worthy person whom the Golden Age has rendered happy,' I thought to myself, as I re-entered Doctor Leete's house.

CHAPTER V

I MAKE A BRILLIANT BUT IMPRACTICABLE SUGGESTION, AND LEARN HOW WAR WAS ABOLISHED

AFTER dinner that evening we were all sitting in Mrs Leete's drawing-room, where Edith had engaged my services to hold a skein of wool while she unwound it.

In this world of emulation it is a satisfaction to know that there is one calling in the pursuit of which a premium is set upon failure; I allude to the performance of that function which young ladies, who have wool to be unwound, exact literally at the hands of young gentlemen. To judge from the awkward evolutions of the latter, the accomplishment is by no means easy to acquire; for the way in which the thread *will* get entangled, thus necessitating the skilful application of the lady's fingers, is really wonderful. I have always noticed, however, that the more awkward the man is,

instead of feeling shame, the greater is his satisfaction with himself; while, singular to relate, the lady's interest in the performance increases in direct proportion to the amount of work she is called upon to do. This phenomenon has so frequently come under my observation, that I seriously contemplate the establishment of a wool-club where ladies and gentlemen, the latter selected by the former, for that is the essence of the game, may meet for pleasant and harmless recreation.

But of all skein-holders before or since, I certainly believe myself to have been the most awkward that evening. As a matter of fact, Edith could do nothing with me, except administer sharp reproofs tempered with delicious touches of her little white fingers. Reprobate as I was, I liked both immensely, especially the finger-touches; and though I did my level best to make the thread run more smoothly by suggesting a slight moistening of the skein, in endeavouring to do which I—inadvertently, of course—found my lips in contact with her hand, she declared my conduct abominable, and vowed she would not again ask me to hold a skein for her. From her

manner of saying this, I verily believed she would keep her word until another skein required unwinding.

When our task was at an end, and I had received a delightful look of thanks from Edith's laughing eyes, thus belying her unkind words, and leading me to hug myself with the assurance of having performed my part to the very letter, Doctor Leete closed the book he had been reading, and suggested an adjournment to the housetop. Thither we all went, and after our cigars were lighted, the doctor was good enough to indicate his readiness to answer any question I might have for him.

I said that I had been thinking a great deal about the Elephant, and if he did not object, I should like some information on that matter.

'You said, doctor,' I remarked, 'that there are three thousand houses in the ward; consequently the Elephant has as many dining-rooms.'

'That is perfectly correct, Julian.'

'How many waiters are employed there?'

'As the dinner hour is the same for all, three thousand waiters are required, and an additional three hundred for emergency duty.'

'And how many cooks?'

'A hundred begin the preparations; their work is taken up by a second hundred, and theirs by a third; for cooking being a disagreeable calling, the hours of cooks are not at all long.'

'Of course, persons are required for washing-up—how many of these?'

'About six hundred in all.'

'Let me see,' I said, 'three thousand three hundred waiters, three hundred cooks, six hundred to wash up—that makes four thousand two hundred persons employed there. It seems a large number.'

'But that is not all,' smilingly observed the doctor. 'As a matter of fact, there is a superintendent for every ten waiters, which makes three hundred superintendents, and to each ten of these there is a superintendent of a higher grade, with a still higher official over each ten of the latter grade, and a supreme functionary, the Master of the Elephant, over all.'

'Then to the former total we have to add three hundred, thirty, three, and one, or three hundred and thirty-four in all, and the grand total comes to four thousand five hundred and thirty-four,' I remarked.

'You are not at the end of the list yet,' said Doctor Leete. 'You forget the cleaners and dusters of the rooms, the carpenters, plumbers, polishers, etc. — of these classes about four hundred persons are needed. Then you must reckon in a small army of clerks and storekeepers, and all these officials have superintendents over them, with officers of higher grade over *them*, and so on. Counting all these, the grand total must be put somewhere near six thousand.'

'Dear me!' I exclaimed, 'what an astonishing number;' and for a few minutes I was silent. Then a strange idea came into my head.

'There are three thousand houses in the ward, and six thousand people employed at the Elephant. My dear doctor, that is just two persons for each house! Why not dismantle the Elephant, and distribute its employees among the householders?'

'Capital! capital!' cried Edith, clapping her hands. 'Oh, father, what a splendid idea!'

Doctor Leete seemed lost in thought a minute, then he rose from his chair and heartily shook my hand.

'Julian, my boy,' he said, with a tremor

in his voice, 'your idea is a most extraordinary one. If you continue in your present course, there is no limit to the height you may attain, not even the presidency itself.'

'Yes, father,' said Edith, 'and with someone in the house, next time you forget your latch-key there will be no chance of your sticking fast in a window.'

'And we shall not have our dinner spoiled,' chimed in Mrs Leete.

'Nor will it be necessary to drag a ladder through the streets,' added the doctor. 'Dear me, I shall remember that terrible ladder for many a day.'

'Nor will young ladies, when you help them into a dark house, suddenly disappear, so that you cannot tell what has become of them, and anxiously expect every minute to hear them fall down several flights of stairs, of course breaking their necks in the process,' I remarked, with a sly glance at Edith. But she was prepared for me this time.

'And men will not tumble down and bruise their foreheads so as to become quite hideous, and render necessary a course of rubbing with clastanodyne if they are ever to mingle in decent society again,' she boldly replied.

'But, no,' added the doctor, after a pause, 'I fear it will not do. Let me see, was there not some such arrangement in the nineteenth century?'

'That was precisely the system then in vogue,' I answered.

'Then it will be hopeless to bring the matter before my guild with the object of presenting a petition to the Grand Council of Labour in support of the suggested reform,' replied my host, sorrowfully. 'Somebody would be sure to trot out Storiot or Ramsbottom; and the mere mention of the proposed improvement as having obtained in the nineteenth century would be sufficient to condemn the proposal offhand. You cannot conceive, Julian, the amount of prejudice existing against that unhappy century and all its works. Though myself firmly wedded to our present system, I do think the feeling I have mentioned is too rabid among the people as a whole.'

This completely ruined my brilliant suggestion, and from the proud position of a prospective Saviour of Society, I felt myself cast headlong into the pit wherein idealists moan and feebly lift up unavailing hands. So I changed the subject and said,—

'By-the-bye, doctor, to my great surprise you told me the other day that war is a thing of the past. To my great surprise, I say, because, when I fell into my trance, so far from there being any indication of universal peace, the armaments and war budgets of all nations were continually on the increase, and scarcely a month passed without the invention of a new weapon, or of some cunningly-devised defensive instrument whereby its destructive power was neutralised.'

'You have yourself partly suggested the solution of the riddle,' replied Doctor Leete. 'For when the world saw, as the sum-total of a whole series of costly inventions, no advantage to any nation either in attack or in defence, the victory of the peace party already loomed in sight.'

'Was there no great conflagration in Europe, then?' I asked, with intense interest.

'No great conflagration; only small localised outbreaks in the Balkan region. No, the last great war took place on American soil.'

'Indeed!' I replied. 'Pray let me have the particulars, my dear doctor.'

'The date of that war,' said my host, settling himself in his chair, 'was 1936—that is sixty-four years ago. It arose in this way. For some time past the European nations had taken over the government of Eastern Asia, and among the results of the introduction of western notions had been a portentous increase in the population of those countries, until what with Russians, Germans, English, French, Chinese, Tartars and Coreans, the land was so densely peopled that the authorities became seriously apprehensive of their inability to find food for the vast hordes. In these circumstances, covetous eyes were cast upon the Western States of the Union and the Mexican Republic, and a slight quarrel—about the Sandwich Islands, I think—was made the pretext for a descent on these shores, and we suddenly found ourselves engaged in a conflict for our very existence.

'Our means of defence having lapsed into a state of disorganisation, thanks to want of foresight on the part of a series of *laissez-faire* administrations, there was nothing for it but that the people should rise *en masse* and repel the invaders. If the number of our enemies was immense—it is fixed by Rams-

bottom at nearly three and a half millions —the Stars and Stripes escorted ten times that number of American men and women.'

'Women!' I exclaimed in wonder.

'Yes, men *and women*,' quietly replied my host, 'for Americans fully recognised the magnitude of the crisis, and with one heart and voice announced to the world the only possible result of the conflict, namely, the elimination of war as a means of settling international differences. Without arms, except that infallible palladium, a righteous cause, they advanced with inexorable decision until they came in touch with the enemy, whom they at length overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers.'

'But the loss must have been simply awful,' I interjected.

'Each invader, it is calculated, killed or wounded, on an average, six of our people before he was secured: our total loss was therefore nearly twenty-one millions, but I assure you, Julian, all historians allow the benefits gained by it greatly to outweigh that loss, frightful though it was; for from henceforth all that a nation had to do, when threatened with an attack, was to mass its adult population on the frontier, with the

object of remorselessly crushing the disturber of its peace. But the example of that great conflict sufficed. Two years elapsed, and then an international conference was summoned to consider the situation. In vain the military party strove to gain its point: it was only too plain that the sun of militarism had set, and after a fortnight's consideration, the disbandment of all armies was agreed to, and the proclamation of the universal brotherhood of man soon followed.'

I was astounded at this recital. At last I exclaimed,—

'What an immense achievement! But how greatly human nature must have changed while I was in that trance.'

'Pardon me, Julian,' said the doctor, 'but you are mistaken there. At least Ramsbottom has collected evidence showing that the germ of the idea, I mean of the folly of war, was already in existence during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and that a peace propaganda on an immense scale was initiated at the beginning of the twentieth. This prepared the way for that magnificent martyrdom of American men and women which has raised our nation to pre-eminence universally

acknowledged. The scene of the glorious conflict,' added my host, glowing with animation, 'is Armageddon in Utah. To that plain, the Mecca of a ransomed race, throng pilgrims from every clime, never weary of hearing discourses on so unparalleled an achievement, and of mixing their souls with the sublime music in whose deathless numbers are chronicled that holy renunciation of life with all its attendant pathos, the mourning of a widowed nation refusing to be comforted, and the ineffable adoration of humanity—I allude to the Grand Mass of Bielacheniakowski.'

There seemed to be a lump in my host's throat as he spoke the last words. As for Mrs Leete she was in tears, and I felt almost persuaded to follow her example; but my attention was at that moment diverted towards Edith, who, with hands pressed to her face, broke into a passion of sobs. Now I may tell the reader that I object to weeping, especially when the tears are wrung out of beautiful eyes designed for quite other purposes. In the hope of changing tears to smiles, I therefore tried to think of something ludicrous, and Thomas Hood providentially coming into

my mind, I began softly reciting one of his whimsical pieces. This had the effect of putting an end to the sobs, but I scarcely anticipated the sequel, for Edith suddenly arose and, throwing her arms round my neck, began laughing and crying together, so as to make me feel decidedly uncomfortable. The doctor and Mrs Leete here retired, apparently looking upon me as the proper person to bring their daughter round, and I exerted myself to that end. I set her on my knee, and while I continued the recitation, gently put back the hair which had fallen over her forehead. At length she looked up and said,—

'Oh, Julian, how naughty of you to mix up the awful battle of Armageddon with that absurd thing of Hood's! Only think of it; what a harrowing spectacle! what they must have suffered, those poor things! The myriads of the wounded lying out there days and days mingled with the dead, the shrieks, the groans of the dying, and their last cry of utter, utter despair! Oh, that horrible, horrible battle!' and she passed an arm over her face as if to ward off some frightful vision; then she put her head on my shoulder and set to crying softly.

With patience I brought her round. I besought her not to think of the irrevocable past. I bade her remember that the agony of those glorious martyrs had long since come to an end, and that their memory was for ever enshrined in the innermost recesses of the human heart. Then I spoke of the love her parents bore her, and dwelt, in terms of adoration, upon my own passion. At length she gave a deep sigh, and when, as soon as I felt that the proper time had arrived, I alluded to other matters, she gradually joined in the conversation, and soon resumed her usual sprightliness.

Oh, Edith! Edith! beautiful enigma, incarnation of all that is fascinating and mysterious in womanhood, two unfathomable abysses of delicious mirth and inscrutable tears enshrined in that paradise of beauty transcendent! As I recall the evening that revealed to me the depths of tenderness latent in your exquisite nature, sighs of regret steal from my lips, and again for the moment I am oppressed with the feeling of utter loneliness which held me in its merciless grip when first I learnt of my loss. Truly indeed are we of near kinship to dreams, for of the four present that

evening on Dr Leete's housetop I alone remain, and Edith Leete has vanished for ever! Yet I will not anticipate.

. . . . . .

'By-the-bye, darling,' I remarked, just before bedtime had arrived, 'what is a chrysochronosceptic?'

'Hush! hush! Julian, you bad boy,' she answered, putting her hand on my mouth to prevent me from speaking. Then she added in a low voice, 'How glad I am you asked me that question, and not father.'

'Why?' I whispered, gently withdrawing her hand. 'Is it poisonous? Will it bite?'

'No, you stupid thing, of course not,' she said, laughing. 'It is far more serious than that; at least some people think so.'

'Then what in the name of Fortune *is* it?' I queried.

'Well now, dear,' and she put her mouth close to my ear, 'you have heard father talk about the Grand International Council that meets to adjust any dispute arising between nations about the quality of the articles interchanged?'

'Yes,' I replied.

'Now picture to yourself the scene: the great pundits drawn from all parts of the

earth, assembled in solemn conclave, and the court ceremoniously declared open. Then, amid the hushed suspense of the multitude, rises a brisk little somebody to complain of the cheese sent from Denmark to Kamchatka!'

She was shaking with suppressed laughter, and I had great difficulty in restraining myself.

'But what has all this to do with chrysochronoscepticism?' I asked.

'Please do not interrupt so rudely, sir,' was the reply. 'What has it to do with chrysochronoscepticism? Just this: it was the very circumstance which led Jayne, the founder of the chrysochronosceptics, to commence with an open mind his comparison of present with past times. A chrysochronosceptic is therefore a follower of Jayne, who denies that the Golden Age, admirable though it be from some points of view, is the best for men, either morally or spiritually. By elderly people his heresy is considered very sad indeed; but most of us younger ones are more liberally minded, and many think Jayne not altogether wrong. Only, please do not say anything on the subject to father, for although by no means a bigot,

he is strongly opposed to the new notions. But if you really wish to know what is thought about the doctrine by a conventional author, you will find a short story on the subject in one of Berryan's volumes.'

Before retiring that night, I secured the book referred to, and getting into bed, perused the following story.

CHAPTER VI

'THE CHRYSOCHRONOSCEPTIC': A NOVELETTE, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BERRYAN

If the statement be correct, which alleges that the happiness of a nation must be measured by its dearth in the matter of annals, alas! how little felicity can we suppose to have obtained in past ages, when we bear in mind the records handed down to us, so voluminous as to be a stumbling-block to our historians, and so teeming with revelations of the want and misery then prevailing, that the moralist rises from their perusal with feelings not far removed from despair. By some daring contemners of the present, the glorious time wherein a gracious Providence has ordained our lot to be cast has been sneered at as the 'uneventful period,' as if *that* were not the highest tribute they could offer to an age of whose grandeur they prove themselves such unworthy partakers. Some minds, indeed,

may be so warped as to try and make us believe they prefer the stress and peril of a storm to the calm haven where alone dwell safety and peace; and after hurling their inoffensive shafts at what they are pleased to call the commonplace existence of to-day, may expect us to think them serious in advocating a return to a system of society condemned not only by all right-thinking men among us, but by some of the most pregnant writers who flourished when that system was in vogue. But every period has had its pessimists, those deluded wanderers from the highway trodden by the feet of toiling and trusting humanity, and who, vainly conceiting to find some exit, stumble in the blind alley of scepticism with no prospect of release. We may, indeed, lament the rise of the sect in our time; though, as a phenomenon of atavism, which it undoubtedly is, the fact seems scarcely calculated to take a thoughtful mind by surprise. It is the merest truism to say that any estimate of a historical period, to be worthy of serious attention, demands a sedulously cultivated capacity for seizing those elusive traits which lie concealed beneath the surface of phenomena, a capacity our detractors have shown

themselves lamentably deficient in. On our part, we make bold to affirm that though the Golden Age may at first sight seem less adapted to treatment by the novelist than some of the ages preceding it, such is really not the case; nay, that events happen now which could hardly have been imagined by earlier writers, and of the truth of this statement the following short story, no figment of the fancy, but the record of an actual occurrence, must convince even the most sceptical reader.

. . . . . .

The little Nebraska town of Johnsville was in a state of unusual ferment. Time out of mind, except for the arrival of the inevitable babies, and the consignment to his or her last resting-place of some familiar figure to be no more seen, there had been scarcely a change in the inhabitants of the place. Every man knew to which guild his neighbour belonged, and could tell to a minute the number of hours he worked, his position and prospects in his craft, and everything relating to his past and present history. Not a woman but knew all the secrets of her feminine friends, who, on their part, were as well acquainted with hers;

moreover, all were on the same plane of absolute equality, so that nothing could disturb the even tenor of their way. A state of things to dream of, would have been said only a century ago, but nowadays, as everybody knows, realised down to its minutest particular.

When, therefore, a stranger, some fifty years of age, announced his intention of taking up his abode in the town, the curiosity aroused may easily be understood. Many were the stories told about him: he had been this and that, and much else besides; some said he came from the South, others affirmed his accent to be that of the Eastern States, while, according to a third opinion, as stoutly maintained, he was of foreign birth and bringing-up. But not one of these surmises was confirmed by the stranger, who maintained an icy reserve it was impossible to thaw. He called himself Jabez Scroggs; not a pleasant name to be sure; indeed, an epic poem, or some grand deed of self-denial, would assuredly fall flat if brought before the world under such a patronymic. Yet there was no getting over it; Jabez Scroggs he was, and Jabez Scroggs he remained, in his wicked impenitence, till

the melancholy catastrophe that caused his disappearance from the world.

On his arrival at Johnsville, Scroggs's first object was to secure a suitable house; and the difficulty he manifested in coming to a decision on this important matter at once led people to suspect him of eccentricity. Even the smallest type of house sanctioned by the Administration was too expensive; and he scoffingly observed that, as he did not intend to lay down a cycle track round the rooms, he must have something on a less ambitious scale. In vain it was argued that the income everybody receives from the State is based upon the fact that nowadays roomy houses are considered necessary. He sneered at the supposed necessity, curtly adding that he was his own master and should do as he pleased.

But when, after obtaining possession of a small allotment on the outskirts of the town, he proceeded to lay in a stock of timber, many were the surmises among the people as to what the man's object could possibly be. However, they had not long to wait; in a short time foundations were dug, and Scroggs's intention of building a house for himself became clear. Then a difficulty

arose, for the committee of the Builders' Guild interposed, and pointed out that the right of erecting dwellings was vested in them. How, they argued, could the present system hold together unless every man kept his proper place in society? If any person could become his own builder, what was to hinder people doing for themselves that which the State had allotted to others, and in this way throwing the organisation of labour into confusion? Scroggs's action was declared antagonistic to the great principle of the enthusiasm for humanity, a principle received with a sardonic smile by the offender, on whose operations the attempted interposition had not the remotest effect.

An injunction was therefore obtained, and in due course the case came before the Court of Atavism. The three judges, one sitting and two pleading, by whom disputes are nowadays adjusted, were in agreement as to the utter barbarity of the defendant, and ascribed the absence of a specific law on the point to the failure of the legislature to conceive the possibility of such unnatural conduct in this advanced age. But as Scroggs had not infringed the law, a decision was given

in his favonr, and from that time he was allowed to go on his way unmolested.

It was what in rude ages was called a log-cabin that he built, a mere shelter from wind and rain such as, inconceivable though it seems to us, human beings were then fain to be content with; and in this miserable place Scroggs lived in solitary retirement. When the dinner hour arrived, and groups of ladies and gentlemen in evening attire trooped to the Rhinoceros or the Axolotl, Scroggs was not of their number; and you would have looked in vain for him in the museum, and the picture gallery, at the lecture or the At Home, or indeed at any of those happy gatherings where people meet for innocent enjoyment. His purchases from the ward store were on the most niggardly scale; and, deprived of the companionship of books and with no solace from music—for he grudged even the small sum telephonic communication with the civic music-hall costs—his life must have been wretched to a degree. Well-meaning attempts to open up intercourse with him were made by several of the townspeople, but without avail. Indeed, he rarely went abroad except for a lonely ramble in the neighbouring pine

forest; for the most part he remained shut up in the cabin, and what transpired there no man knew.

The secret was kept until concealment was no longer possible. It then became known that the singular personage concerning whom so many rumours had been rife was, of all callings in the world, a writer; for a large consignment of books came addressed to him from the national printing factory, the parcels being all marked in the same way thus :—

SCROGGS.
THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS.

But this event served only to cast a deeper shadow of mystery over the man, for the books were stored in the cabin, not distributed among subscribers. Moreover, a gruff refusal was returned to all hints as to the existence of a desire among the townspeople to peruse the new work.

Then some more timber being obtained, another hut went up, the purpose of which became clear when, a few months after the arrival of the first consignment, a second came to hand. This time the parcels were inscribed :—

Scroggs.
A Wrecked Life.

These volumes were locked up in the second cabin by the eccentric author, who still, as before, made no attempt to bring his wares before the world. And so it went on: from time to time new cabins were run up, to be successively filled with copies of the works written by the hermit's pen. These, it was noticed, all bore titles expressive of the man's bitterly irreconcilable humour. *Gehenna on Earth*, *In Sackcloth and Ashes*, *The Modern Mephistopheles*, *A Soul in Torment*, such and many similar titles can be seen, entered under the name of Scroggs, in the archives of the printing factory.

In former times a man acting in this way would have been the subject of a judicial inquiry, and the fact of his continuing to pour forth volume after volume of lucubrations, not only without any desire of reward for his labour, but with the evident intention of keeping the product of his brain strictly to himself—such a fact would doubtless have been urged as a strong proof of lunacy, and the unhappy author, pronounced incapable of managing his affairs, would

have no longer been able to satisfy his unhealthy craving. But in those times, when life's master-motive was accumulation, there is too much reason to believe that the cupidity of relatives often lurked behind inquiries into a man's sanity; and in this opinion all our historians, Ramsbottom as well as Storiot, Williton no less than Raynor, are in full agreement. Nowadays, however, stronger proofs are demanded before a person is consigned to a lunatic asylum; and, needless to say, even when lunacy is demonstrated beyond the possibility of a doubt, no one can have any interest in the infliction of so terrible a sentence upon the unfortunate sufferer. In Scroggs's case, the man was clearly within his strict right; his papers were perfectly in order; he had worked as an engineer, and had received his discharge on reaching the age of forty-five. Evidently his one pleasure in life was writing, and after reaching the age for retirement, there was nothing to prevent his exclusive devotion to the hobby, and he was entitled to demand from the printing office as many copies of his books as he wished, provided he could produce enough credit to pay for them. It was his refusal

to pay house rent, and the extremely penurious scale on which he lived, that enabled him to gratify his taste.

So the years went by, and fresh works were produced by the indefatigable Scroggs, and whenever storage room was wanted, a fresh cabin would be built. The townsfolk gradually accustomed themselves to the inscrutable phenomenon, till at length they ceased from mentioning the name of the extraordinary personage who had so unceremoniously taken up his abode in their midst.

The allotment secured by the Solitary was but a small one, and in course of time it was fully occupied by the cabins he had been continually erecting. It was then that he again became the subject of comment, for the people began asking one another what he would do now? There was no chance of his getting another piece of ground, that was certain ; the allotment committee scouted the idea to a man, and had they not done so, the various guilds whose privileges had been encroached upon were prepared to bring any amount of pressure to prevent a continuance of the injustice. What, then, would Scroggs do?

From the narrative to which this is an

introduction, we gather that Scroggs was himself greatly exercised by this difficulty. For a few weeks he refrained from writing, and passed his time in aimless rambling about the forest, as if he expected to find there an answer to the riddle confronting him. But whether it was whispered to him in the forest or no, Scroggs got his answer, and it was one not even the boldest guesser would have hit upon.

One evening, as the people were leaving the Rhinoceros, a fierce November wind came tearing through the town. It hurtled round the street corners, stormed against the windows which it every moment threatened to burst in, and clove for itself a pathway through the trees, remorselessly stripping them of their wealth of ruddy foliage. The waters of the river were thrown by it into mimic waves that sullenly lashed the low, green-clad banks; while in the forest the uproar was simply deafening as the great pines swayed and groaned, tested to their utmost capacity by the stress of that implacable onset. It was amid this scene of violence, fit setting for such a drama, that Scroggs made his exit from a despised world.

Suddenly a cry of 'fire' was raised, and

as the flames shot upward, everybody rushed to the scene. Yes, there could be no mistake about it, the Solitary's cabins were blazing; and there, a silhouette embossed against the glare, was Scroggs himself. No effort was being made to cope with the outbreak, for to all proffers of aid a curt refusal had been returned, and as the nearest houses were too far off to be threatened with destruction, the whimsical curmudgeon was having his way. Moreover, to would-be assistants he had calmly pointed out the hopelessness of any effort they could make to arrest the conflagration; indeed, so general was the ruin, it was only too clear that the fire had broken out in several places at once. The people, therefore, stood afar off watching the grand spectacle, their minds more than ever filled with wonder at their strange fellow-townsman. As for him, he was actually abetting the flames. Now he would make a dive into some cabin not yet fairly alight, to emerge therefrom tottering under a burden which would be hurriedly thrown where fuel was wanted; then for some minutes a dense pall of smoke would hide him from view, and a thrill go through the throng until the indomitable figure re-

appeared. Again and again did this happen; and when at length the fire abated, and a mass of glowing embers was all that met the eye, the crowd slowly dispersed, asking one another in blankest astonishment the oft-repeated question, 'What will he do now?'

But from that night Scroggs was no more seen at Johnsville; he had vanished as mysteriously as he came. Among the many conjectures as to his fate, the one most in favour was that he had betaken himself to some distant locality, there to resume his eccentric career. On our part, we unhesitatingly dissent from this opinion, for we have carefully searched the national registers, where the last debit entry against Scroggs is dated only two days before the catastrophe. Moreover, the unused remainder of his credit-cards never came to hand, and how could this be unless their owner had perished on that eventful night? But what seems to prove our inference up to the hilt is that no further demands upon the national printing office were made by the misanthrope from that time, and of this fact we hold indisputable evidence.

When the ground was searched, nothing

could be found except a small scorched packet lying beside a heap of ashes, and evidently intended for the flames, a fate it had in some way escaped. The packet contained the photograph of a woman in the full tide of youth and beauty, as well as a manuscript bearing the title, *The Story of My Life*. Photograph and manuscript are both lying before us; and as no further remains from the same pen are known to exist, the story furnishes the only clue, such as it is, to the mystery surrounding the curious subject of this notice.

Before he enters on the perusal of the story, a word to the reader will not be out of place. It is, we presume, scarcely necessary to contend that the tragedy overshadowing this man's life cannot, without the grossest misconception, be ascribed to any shortcoming or oversight in the present system of society. If it be true, as Scroggs himself avers, that the offence for which he suffered would in past times have been considered no offence at all, then so much the worse for the ethical standard the men of those times chose to set up for themselves. With profound knowledge of human nature it has been said that 'one should be careful

of one's thoughts, deeds might then shift for themselves,' and why? because, although often performed without apparent premeditation, evil deeds are invariably the result of a series, maybe a long series, of previous states of mind all tending towards an outlet in action, and likely to reach such outlet whenever the will happens to be paralysed for the moment. Now, as every unbiassed person must allow, Scroggs's thoughts at the time immediately preceding the catastrophe he so vividly describes, and also—as he who can read between the lines will gather in spite of the culprit's disclaimer—for some time previously, were a fitting prelude to his dastardly crime. True, the immensity of his repentance may give him a title to our sympathy; but the savageness of the denunciation in which he indulges after finding a fatuous refuge in the discredited ethics of an imperfect civilisation only serves to steel our hearts against a nature which, in spite of some elements of generosity, clearly shows itself to have been essentially vulgar. As for his 'visions,' they may be promptly dismissed to the limbo of moonshine; indeed, so little weight do we attach to them that we should like to see the story placed in the

hands of our youth, for it is admirably calculated to bring home, we think, to the partially-instructed mind the dangers of social scepticism, and to afford the teacher a golden opportunity of exposing the dangerous sophisms wherein it abounds. With this short preface we may now leave Scroggs to speak for himself.

The Story of My Life.

'I pass over my early years, for about them there is nothing worthy of record: it will suffice to observe how the usual routine of school preceded that course at college now enjoyed by all young people, though in former times it was to a large extent the privilege of the favoured few. And let me here state my conviction that, as regards education, the present age is immensely in advance of its predecessors—a tribute the more willingly yielded, because, in almost every other respect, I have learnt to consider the much-vaunted progress of this so-called "Golden Age" to be retrogression pure and simple. When I say I have learnt this, I mean that my information has been gained by years of unremitting study, during which no leisure hour but was turned to

account in the effort—I may say, the passionate effort—to unravel the tangled web of history, and gain an unbiassed view of man's life in the past.

'If this story of mine were likely to be perused—but my plans are so laid as to render that impossible—the reader would naturally ask himself why I should have devoted myself to such a study. Why, indeed, he would say, in these days when labour is rendered as little irksome as possible, and ample time and opportunity are afforded for developing one's faculties; why, with Art's delightful fields to roam in, with the ineffably mysterious world of Music at one's door, with free access to those triumphs of the written word transfigured into the glorious lineaments of Literature, and training so thorough as to render one capable of appreciating, in all its depth of meaning, achievements in the domain of Science which acclaim mankind the master of force and matter instead of their humble slave; why, with this magnificent banquet at command, turn from it to batten on husks, to eat one's heart out in scorn and bitterness, and drink of the poisoned chalice of scepticism? The answer to that question is com-

prised in the one pregnant word, Destiny. It is Destiny which has separated me from the world; which has set thorns in my brow, and consigned me to the companionship of darkness and despair. Think you I am so blind that I cannot see the loveliness of this wonderful life of man? So dull as not to vibrate to the innermost cord of my being with its touching pathos? So insensate that a day—ay, even an hour—can pass by and find me not hungering and thirsting for the sweet paradises in the lulling murmur of whose streams there is peace for the heavy-laden? But I have been shut out from those blissful realms—shut out, as in the old legend was the ancestor of our race from his Eden, and by a decree as inexorable, by as irreversible a doom.

'Times without number have I reviewed the circumstances of my starless existence, but never to discover among them a single cause for thankfulness, with this one exception, namely, that she whom I called mother, and to prop the pillow of whose old age would have been my sacred privilege, was taken away before my name had become a byword and a reproach among men. Our relations were of the tenderest kind; for my

father had died in my early infancy, and more distant kinsfolk having passed beyond our ken, we were alone in the world, and clung to each other the more closely in consequence of that loneliness. Heavy, indeed, was the blow that fell upon me when I closed her eyes; though, could I have looked but a few short years into the future, I should have received that blow as a blessing without alloy. Yes, though the whole man within me rises up in indignation and passionate protest that it should be so, my mother's death was the mercifulest thing that could possibly have happened.

'I went with credit through my three years of unskilled employment, and in due course was inducted into the Engineers' Guild. Here my progress was rapid indeed, for I proved myself an apt scholar, and soon became a master at my craft. Step by step I rose, and with each rise I felt, in the bearing of my superiors and the marks of respect tendered by the rank and file, the fresh persuasion of a brilliant future in store for me. The red ribbon, that highest decoration, was always before my eyes; and the ever-nearing prospect of wedded happiness with Agnes, my affianced bride, shed a lustre

over my life, and nerved me to untiring vigour.

'Why, I ask, should her brother have acted towards us as he did? What was there in me, of all men, that could excite repugnance so fiendish in its intensity? Did he suppose that Agnes, having known me from a boy, having years ago promised in due time to become my wife, would accede to his view and give herself to a former lover who had proved the frailty of his passion by wedding another, and now looked to her self-sacrifice for an assuagement of his widowed loneliness? With truth I may say of myself what cannot be said of most men until age has toned down youthful asperities, and judgment sits enthroned where rashness was wont to riot. I say, then, that in those early years I had already learnt the noble lesson of forgiveness; for I saw to how great a degree the individual is but a machine, delivering, with mathematical precision, that which has been accumulated within it by a long series of fortuitous occurrences. With such thoughts how could I long feel resentment for conduct so obviously inexplicable on any other supposition? and though the persecution to which she was subjected was a sore trial for

me, the bitter feelings it roused were tempered with pity for the miserable offender.

'But my advances were almost always met with disdainful nonchalance, and our short reconcilements served only to feed the flame of his animosity, which was ever breaking out in fresh insults. Woe for me that I did not harden my heart and, secure in Agnes's love, take no further thought of the man's malice. But he was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, and whenever contempt for him got the uppermost place and a determination to ignore him as beneath consideration, such sentiments were quickly strangled, for they somehow seemed inextricably mingled with a feeling that rendered her less precious to me in her peerless womanhood. Alas for these reconcilements! and again, alas! for it was during the last of those short respites that the event happened which hurled me from the pinnacle of happiness into the bottomless depths of misery.

We arranged for a short trip in the Rocky Mountains, he and I. The ground was well known to me, who for years had spent the greater part of my vacations in the neighbourhood, and I hoped that our companionship, though it was to last for a few days

only, would bring with it some alleviation of the tension between us. So far, we had got on together remarkably well, and I began congratulating myself on the success of my diplomacy. As the final excursion of our tour, we agreed to traverse a rough and difficult pass leading into a valley amid which, embosomed in a forest of pine trees, stands a pretty little town I was anxious for him to see. There is a very dangerous spot near the summit of that pass; it is a place where, without any notion of risk, the pedestrian sets his foot upon a mass of shelving rock, and if he attempts to advance only a single step, he must lose his balance and be precipitated into the abyss below. Many had been the fatal accidents at this place—so many, in fact, that a stone cross had been erected near it to serve at once as a memento of the dead and a warning to the living. Imagine, therefore, my feelings when, suddenly looking up from the ground, I saw my companion, who was several yards in front of me, rapidly making for the deadly shelf, while he carelessly trolled an air from some opera, accompanying the music with a motion of his arms that convinced me of his entire absorption in himself. I remained motion-

less with fright, and hurriedly called on him to stop, at the same time pointing to the cross in explanation. At the sound of my voice he turned round, and on learning that I declined to follow him, broke into a torrent of abuse, declaring that I was a craven, and, for all my prospects, utterly unworthy of his sister's hand, coarsely adding that I better knew how to insinuate myself into woman's good graces than to act a manly part. In my rage and disappointment at this new manifestation of hostility I remained silent; there was murder in my heart, and a bitter smile rose to my lips as I muttered, "If the fool will go to his death, let him." Had any instinct of humanity remained in me, I should have rushed forward and snatched him from his impending doom; but a demon had possession in my heart, and I simply watched him in silence.

'At length he turned from me with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, and set his foot on the ledge. There was yet time to save him. My limbs were trembling under me; with frightful thumps my heart battered my chest, and a cold sweat oozed from my forehead and hands. And then it was I saw Agnes—saw her as clearly as if she had been

present—looking at me with pitiful eyes, just as she had so often looked when trying, poor soul, to frame excuses for her brother's cruel treatment of us. In an instant the enormity of my conduct was revealed with the intensity of a lightning flash, and I started forward with a piercing cry; but it was too late, for at that very moment he took the fatal step, and with a harrowing staccato of surprise disappeared from view.

'It was eleven days after the accident when I came to myself, and during that time, without exaggeration, I may be said to have lived in a veritable pandemonium. I retain a confused recollection of frightful visions succeeding one another with merciless insistence—visions that I strove to banish by summoning all the means in my power—that I besieged with piteous entreaties to leave me, if only for one brief hour—but in vain. Phantasm after phantasm arose to torment me. Now I was cowering before a storm of venom hurled against me by the brother — cowering in conscious admission that the heartless taunts were only too true; then it would be Agnes, with an unutterable look of reproach in her eyes—a look that gave way to horror when, in a paroxysm of frenzy at the sight, I en-

deavoured in a few broken sentences to offer some palliation for my conduct. Again the scene would change, and I be standing alone in the midst of a vast concourse of people—wherever my eye turned they were there—innumerable blanched faces fixed upon mine with the same scrutiny of dreadful import. God in Heaven! I must escape from those faces, or I shall go mad! I passed through them; they recoiled at my approach, but with every step in advance fresh ones, all with the same expression, arose to confront me. On and on I pressed, for days, for months, for years, yet they were still round me. Then every individual of that mighty assembly would point at me, and as in thunderous unison the word *murderer* crashed upon my ears, the whole phantasmagoria would dissolve and make way for another, in which the scene at the pass was re-enacted with intensest vividness. Again and again I went through that horrible temptation; again and again that last despairing cry rent the air. I was too late! too late! and to the mournful echo of those words, repeated in remorseless iteration, I felt myself falling down, ever down, into a gulf that seemed fathomless.

'When at last the fever left me and I lay weak as an infant, the awfulness of my position and all its consequences nearly drove me to distraction. I schemed and schemed, examined the matter from every point of view, sent the search-light of analysis into every cranny of motive and intention, but always with the same heart-breaking result. Never for a moment was I able to believe myself innocent. Without doubt the curse of Cain was upon my head, and in the averted looks of those who tended me I read the ratification of my doom.

'In due course I was put upon my trial, and never, though my existence were prolonged for centuries, could the solemnity of that scene pass from my remembrance. From floor to ceiling the crowded court was draped in black. The light of day had been shut out, as if the transaction to take place there were too horrible for any but the sombre illumination that alone was permitted. A hum of awed expectancy greeted my arrival, and at that instant everyone rose as, with stately dignity, the three judges proceeded to take their seats. Profound silence reigned while a clerk read out the charge. At the utterance of the word "murder" a shudder

ran through the assembly, and suppressed sobs resounded from all sides. Then in clear, grave tones the prosecuting judge took up the case. My anticipations were only too true; in the delirium of fever I had heaped against myself accusations which were now produced against me with damning effect. Minute after minute passed by, each of them seeming an hour to me; more and more hopeless became any chance of escape. At length I was called upon to plead. What could I do? I believed myself guilty, though I alone knew that at the very moment of the calamity I would have saved him if I could. Trembling like an aspen, my throat parched, my tongue almost refusing to perform its office, I uttered the fatal word and fell down in a swoon.

'On returning to myself, I realised that one last desperate chance remained. I could try and explain the matter. I could point to my honourable record, to my approaching connection with the dead man; I could make it clear in what sense I accused myself of the deed, not as its actual perpetrator, nay, at the critical instant as in the act of doing my utmost to prevent it. I essayed to do this; but with the first plea of extenuation a

tumult arose and the air resounded with horrified cries. Remember, mine is the only case of murder known among mankind since the new order of society was established, and if admission of the charge had sent a thrill through the audience at the enormity of my crime, the attempt at excuse, after confession, must have seemed too shocking for belief. I was peremptorily ordered to be silent, and the last faint ray of hope vanished when the defending judge announced his entire concurrence in what had fallen from his colleague's lips.

'The mercifulness of this age is a common subject for boasting, but I have arrived at a conclusion by no means in agreement with the general opinion. Ah, why was not death the penalty inflicted on me? Then would the full cup of suffering have borne some measure of equality with the offence, instead of outweighing it a thousandfold. Think of it! Ten years of solitary confinement! Except for my jailer's without the sight of a human face to cheer and stimulate, without the sound of a human voice to shatter the gloomful battalions of silence! And I, too, who had always yearned for the grasp of fellowship, to whom society was as the breath

of life, and the blessed duties of citizenship an unspeakable privilege. But I must hurry over that phase of my life, for it were beyond the jugglery of words adequately to describe a tithe of what I suffered, stupefied, distracted, satiate with despair, during the long-drawn-out agony of my imprisonment.

'A wreck of my former self, looking sixty years old at thirty-five, I was released and returned to my craft. Degraded to the lowest rank, I did not hope for promotion, and, indeed, it never came; though with a proud resolve to owe nothing to the State, I lavished on my daily labour as much strength as I was able. My life was indeed lonely, as no man cared to associate with one to whose past clung memories so painful; neither, for my part, did I introduce myself where my presence would, I knew, have damped the innocent enjoyment in which, under happier circumstances, I should so gladly have participated. In one respect I was now even worse off than I had been when in prison. There the world was, as it were, blotted out; by no reflex, not the faintest, of its myriad voices was my solitude penetrable; no scenes of smiling happiness could there smite me with the consciousness of my eternal out-

lawry. Yet now not a day passed but some trivial commonplace of life would intervene to remind me of my forlorn estate. A mother kissing her child; a bevy of laughing girls trooping down the roadway; the stalwart young fellows resolutely tramping onward with life in fair perspective before them; two lovers bidding each other farewell. These and similar sights threw me in upon myself, and nourished the canker that was gnawing my very heart out.

'Thus matters went on for some time, the shadows about my path ever becoming deeper until I felt the imminence of some crisis which must put a term to my endurance. Beating about in anguish for a means of combating the threatened catastrophe, I bethought me of music, and caused myself to be connected by telephone with the sources whence it issued. But vain were all expectations of relief from that quarter. Instead of lifting the burden from my heavy-laden spirit; instead of whispering the subtle secrets of some sphere where sin could never stain and sorrow was beyond the reach of conception, I found myself in the presence of malicious sprites who mocked me with suggestions of a paradise from which I alone of

all men was banished and for ever, where transcendent felicity awaited all pilgrims but me, and the rapturous, maddening fruitage of love grew for all hands to gather except mine. In an access of despondency I hurried to the mountain palace of my guild; and still no syllable of comfort was vouchsafed me. Nay, in sight of the crystalline rocks, those immemorial evidences of inconceivably slow upheaval, my mind could dwell on nothing except the operation of Titanic force, compared with which man's puny efforts are but a laughing-stock, and of law, its necessary and immutable enunciation. Such as those human efforts were mine striving to purge the iniquity wherewith I was tainted; that contemplation of law served only to brand upon my brain the indelible statement of precepts embodied in the conscience of mortals, precepts which I had transgressed. I set my face toward the sea; but lo! in the infinite turmoil of its waters was but one voice, the voice of my lost Agnes, incessantly reminding me of what was, of what might have been. Oh, well for her that the Angel of Death had in mercy transplanted that exquisite flower into the everlasting gardens of her God! She, at least, had

entered the haven of rest; that haven for which I, a wreck and a castaway, sighed every hour of my life, and sighed without avail.

'I returned to my craft, and threw myself with fiery energy into its various duties. And here let me mention the second particular among our social arrangements, wherein is manifest the incontestable superiority of the present age. At what devil's instigation, I ask, was it that men turned from honest labour as from a pestilence; that they learned to plume themselves on freighting other shoulders with their own proper burden, and foolishly refused the draught which, flavoured with bitterness though it might be, was verily an elixir of life? Ah, when I think of those unnumbered generations, those care-marred faces blinking, with scarcely human expression, on a world of whose beauty and wonder they had but the dimmest apprehension; when I think of the sighs, the groans, the besotted brows of helpless humanity—then indeed my own misfortunes vanish as the morning mist, and tears well up from my surcharged heart. Ye calculating grinders of the faces of the poor, were there *two* lives to be lived then, one in

sorrow and penury, one beside you where weeping was not, nor hunger, nor weariness? Sacred be the memory of their martyrdom; more eloquent than the outpourings of genius the expression of their stifled and purblind intelligence. Had I lived then, though there had been little between us but the basal feelings of mankind, for me it would have been the highest honour to grasp the hand of toil; and I should have turned with loathing and contempt from him who knew it not and who gloried in his baseness.

'It was labour, the plying of the daily task, which helped me through that terrible time. But for that diversion from my thoughts, that slight assuagement of the ever-present accusations of memory, I should without doubt have been then driven to madness. Yet it was only a reprieve; and when the boon of sleep was altogether denied, I knew the end could not be far off. Night after night I lay in restless communion with the brooding hours; day by day my dejection increased, and with it a determination to be no longer the victim of such distress. Yet there was consolation for me, though whence it came I know not; all I know is that in one of those pitiless

night-watches I heard a voice speaking to me, not the voice of Agnes, nor of anyone living or dead that I recognised—doubtless it was merely a subjective impression, having its origin in a disordered system of nerves. With utmost distinctness, scattering the whirr of silence around me, the voice cried, *Write the story;* and over and over the words were repeated, *Write the story.* With an explosion of sardonic laughter I exclaimed, *Write? How can I? How insane a proposal! What impracticable advice!* Thus it went on, the voice and the answer, until another voice was uplifted, *You have suffered, write.* And ever the weary chase continued; the summons to action followed by the despairing reply. At length I could bear it no longer: in a frenzied craze I rose, I seized a pen; like trees in the grasp of an equinoctial storm my hands shook as the words jostled one another in my expectant eagerness; to my disordered vision the arcana of the universe seemed filled with thoughts, nothing but thoughts, all rolling in upon me with imperious insistence. What words! ye heavens! what thoughts! I dipped my pen in the seething torment of hell; I charged it with the divine beatitudes of

heaven. Epigram followed epigram; invective, sarcasm, pathos that sent the tears coursing down my cheeks, rage that clenched my teeth and hunted the blood through the veins till my brain reeled and my temples throbbed again, all were mingled in that astounding revelation of undreamt-of power.

'Except for the intervals of employment at my craft, during three days and as many sleepless nights I continued writing. My fellow-workmen noticed the agitation into which I was thrown; they gathered in whispering knots, their awestruck glances all centred upon me. To them my perturbed looks and wild demeanour must have appeared the visible signs of conscience fermenting within. But I cared not for them; a peremptory command was pealing in my ears, and disobedience, as I too well knew, meant death. At length the impulse flickered away; the completion of my task brought an indescribable feeling of relief; and with a storm of exultation in the sublime consciousness of genius surging through me, I flung myself on my bed and fell asleep.

'From that time I ceased to be a target for the shafts of madness. I had passed through the fiery furnace, not scatheless,

indeed, yet alive. As though it were experiment on a second self, I could now probe, without swerving, the wound that had so nearly proved fatal. With concentrated endeavour I lived again that time of agony in its every phase; and then, just as the examination was finished, in one whirlwind charge, the whole array of realisation was upon me. "God in heaven!" I passionately cried, "is it possible that more than one of Thy creatures can have so suffered?" With that an irresistible desire leapt up into my heart—I would see for myself; I would ransack the records of the past; with me should it rest to re-clothe those bleaching bones in flesh; with me alone, for I had already learnt to scorn the academic pedantries of contemporary writers. What, indeed, could they know of tribulation whose lives had lain in the ways of pleasantness and peace? But I had fronted the battle in all its fury; I had wrestled with unearthly combatants, and torn standards from the very citadel of the Arch-fiend. Stricken well-nigh to death, but still invincible, I was the only living man to whom the past, in all its terror and beauty, its joy and its sorrow, could appeal with the chance of an unbiassed verdict.

'Obedient to my behest, the cohorts of the Ages filed before me in solemn procession; not a feature escaped me; no detail, even the smallest, could evade my penetrating search. But from among that mighty company of phantoms, conjured once more into being, none came forward to claim fellowship with me. Alone I paced the shore of Time's illimitable ocean as before I had stood alone in the world of living men. Surely, I said, such affliction as mine must have its counterpart, sepulchred, it may be, in some unfathomed abyss of oblivion, yet still there. Vehemently I applied myself to sift the archives of justice, to pluck from their dread hiding-places the secrets of human wickedness and frailty. While absorbed in this quest a truth was revealed to me, of whose existence I had not the faintest suspicion. Everyone is now taught to look upon law as a tissue of infernal jugglery, woven by knavish hands and dyed with the sorry tints of folly and wretchedness, and, in the destruction of the accursed thing, is taught to hail the emancipation of men from intolerable bondage. To my surprise I found in jurisprudence a noble science — its sanctions reared upon the

eternal foundations of righteousness, its judgments keen and clear-cut as a crystal's facets. In a fervour of assiduity I sought an answer to another question that now cried for solution. It was this—*How deep was my guilt when judged by the newly-discovered canon? Had I lived in those times what would have been my punishment?* Thread by thread I followed the clue; step by step I advanced towards that goal on which my eyes were riveted with unflinching devotion. At last the pitying heavens opened above me; they hurtled triumphant with the thunder of fiery voices proclaiming *that I was innocent!* Not branded with one corrosive stigma, though spotless else, mark; not sinning, albeit in lower degree than my chastisement: but *innocent!* Sweet strains of comfort, how ye lapped me in lullabies of sonorous modulation like the crooning of a mother to her restive child! Wild waves of hatred, how hoarsely did ye mock me, bidding you arise and deluge a demoniac world! Yes, those men whose social environments excite the smiling superiority of an easy and peace-crying generation, with one voice would have pronounced me guiltless; they would have sent me forth free

to drink of life's consecrated waters, free to clasp in transports of abandonment her whose beauty was a clarion-call to nobleness, who had died desolate and broken-hearted, and now lay mouldering in her early grave.

'I learnt that, in those times, instead of being immured in the sole presence of a lacerated conscience forced into too luxuriant development, I should have had access to a fellow-man to whom law, in its many phases, was a subject of everyday concern. He would have poured into my wounds the balm of counsel; that fatal self-accusation had then never been uttered, nor those torments of delirium emerged from their turbulent chaos to deliver irrefragable proofs of blood-guiltiness. Moreover, the place where the remains were found would have fortified the plea of accident; and his own violent and headstrong character, a matter of commonest notoriety, would have corroborated the story of my having warned him of the danger he was running into. Ye perverse idiots who, in your overweening ignorance, have spurned the wholesome lessons you should have appraised as among your most precious possessions, what right

had you to lay sacrilegious hands on the thoughts of mortality? They were for the Eternal Judge, not for an earthly; at His bar was their account due, not at yours. Cursed be the lapse from reverence that has prompted a self-sufficient world to derision and contempt for the merciful tenets of the past; cursed be the presumption which dares to affirm that the infinite volume of the human heart has become an easy scroll for every fool who passes by to read. Thrice accursed those instilled precepts of an over-ripe, a too-refined morality —precepts which, suitable though they may be for the torpid and the inane, are but deception to the footsteps of him in whom the stored-up experience of the race reverberates through all its gamut of glory and menace — a decoy alluring him from the refulgent pathway of life into the wildernesses of enduring tragedy and threnetic wail.

'The consolation I had derived from the discovery of my innocence was only short-lived, as I was now perpetually detecting myself in the act of weaving visions, too bright for words, of all the delight which should have been but never could be mine.

Fragment by fragment those beatific fantasies melted away, only to envelop me in well-nigh impenetrable gloom. Oh, I thought, if I could confide my secret to one human soul, if from only one human voice receive that assurance of guiltlessness I was now so fully apprised of, then perhaps I could once more face the world with fortitude. Alas! there was no man to whom I could apply, not one who would have gathered from my speech anything but aggravation of the supposed crime, and looked upon me with pity and abhorrence. But again was I drawn away from that absorbing contemplation of my own woes. Is it possible, I thought, that there can be perfect health where one plague-spot betrays its presence in so livid potency? With that I betook myself to study again the modern system of society, not, as before, in the ignorance of prejudice, and under the guidance of specious teachers to whom convention is as the dictates of omnipotence, but with the enlightenment and mordant doubt wrested from suffering. I tore the veil from those features whereon I had been taught, with hushed veneration, to believe dwelt the divine impress, and found

them instinct with the hues of earth. In grim autopsy I brought the scalpel to that indiscriminating enthusiasm for mankind by which our system is buttressed, and beneath the fair exterior saw disease unmistakably betokened. From my brain, too alert for difficulties to daunt or sophistry to deceive, sprang poignant fire, whereby the framework of the present, with its shallow conceits, was utterly consumed. And now I was aware of a new idea staring me in the face and stinging me into wonderment. Through all its devious courses I tracked it without a moment's flagging, until the conclusion was forced in upon me *that the so-called Golden Age could not last.* Unhappy dreamers, my hatred was not then for you, when a whole sea of compassion sprang up within me, thinking of what an awakening from sleep must be yours! Indeed, if ever I hated you, it was but a perversion of the infinite love in my heart, a thunder-cloud drenching with darkness and fury for a moment only to emphasize traits made more redolent of appealing charm. But from that time never again could the bolt be loosened, never again could clouded wrath canopy my love. In a moment of weakness I had invoked

vengeance; in a flash of proleptic insight was revealed to me an answer to that invocation that curdled my blood and made me wish I had never been born.

'Yes, the end must come, that was certain; there was no possible avenue of escape. The present system has for its logical basis the notion that the earth can produce unlimited supplies of food for its population; yet what little reason is there in this when one remembers how, while these supplies increase in arithmetical ratio, the progressive increase of human beings is geometrical, and the only method of maintaining an equilibrium between the two would be by national interference with life's master-passion—interference which, even if practicable, were a more desperate remedy than the disease it had been employed to cure. Convinced that the downfall of the system is only a matter of time, I now set myself to solve the question, *How long could the catastrophe be averted?* In the search for an answer secure from impeachment, I applied to all possible sources of information; statistics of peoples, land areas, qualities of soil and maxima of food raisable therefrom, passed through my hands to be duly

recorded and weighed, until, as the result of my studies, I learnt that within some period not less than fifty-five nor more than eighty years from the present time, the supply of life's means would begin to fall short of the demand for them. Time after time I plodded through that maze of figures, but always to fail in finding any oversight in the calculation. And then, one by one, the elements of a fearful panorama unrolled themselves before my eye, and held me spellbound by a fascination I could not shake off. I saw the demon of doubt fix his habitation in the countenances of men, and at his approach mirth and ease were taken with panic and fled. I saw the plough wringing scantier and still scantier crops as recourse was had to land whose stubbornness and apathy ever increased, until the trying conflict was relinquished as hopeless. A new era was dawning; an era of distress for which those ill-starred millions, reared in exemption and untutored in the salutary school of adversity, were wholly without preparation. The sullen years rolled on; embarrassments multiplied; the pressure grew more and more merciless until, from all parts of the world, an appalling shout

went up, a cry for bread that came not, for some means of satisfying the implacable cravings within, but none were to be had. In a fitful gleam of determination men went forth to compel succour for their children, only to return disheartened and foredone. The mother stilled her infant's cries with her own insufficient share of nourishment, and dropped dead while soothing it into slumber; famishing crowds gathered wrathful and glowering; they hurled at their leaders imprecations which were returned with ten-fold interest; they stormed the granaries only to find them empty, and sank down by the wayside for very feebleness. Everywhere was disillusion; all marvelled at the crisis, which yet had for years been impending, nay, was latent at the system's very birth; none could suggest a remedy for that which was the inevitable issue of imaginary good divorced from its attendant ministry of evil.

'Darker and darker grew the gloom, until, by slow but invincible advances, repulsed but always returning to the charge, the brutal squadron of passions recaptured humanity's outworks. Once more the world became the scene of conflict, once more did

pity receive its mortal blow, and men glared at their fellows with the malignity of fiends. The ancient war-cry—"Death to the weak"—now re-echoed from myriad throats; blood streamed forth like water; a new reign of hell on earth was inaugurated. And still Nature, with her daily mutations, her ever-active processes, so marvellous yet so familiar, showered benediction on a sphere where man, fashioned in God's image, raved and staggered in the intoxication of devilry.

'The vision was too frightful. I felt I must escape, I must fly for refuge, but where? Shuddering and terror-stricken, I fled to my only shelter, myself. Merciful God! I thought, in what horrific purlieus of torment, glutted with outrage and infinite lamentation, have I then been agonising, that reflection on my own calamity should bring me relief? Yet what were my distresses beside those others I had so lucidly visualised? What was my cross compared with that whereon I had seen mankind transfixed in aidless martyrdom? Ah, that I could have lifted up my voice in warning of the tribulation to come! But who would have believed me? Who among those careless throngs would have taken to heart my premonitions, and not

ascribed them to the working of remorse and frustration? No, I was alone, always alone; a repository of awful secrets that must perish with me, that must indeed have killed me had I not retraced my course to the point whence I had started.

'Struggling desperately to concentrate my thoughts on myself, I at last succeeded in blunting the impression of that other and incomparably more painful drama. The old inspiration was convoked, and it obeyed the call. I shot the shuttle through that warp of unparalleled experience, and wrought textures wherein, irradiated by passion and fantasy, my story was pourtrayed with unerring hand. Yet, if ever I allowed myself a leisure moment, my ears were deafened by the outcry of a betrayed race, and before my eyes hovered those inflammable scenes of carnage and desolation. After a time, it occurred to me how nothing on this earth is eternal; how even what seems the very worst may be a stepping-stone to something better. This was the prelude to a fresh apparition that laboured within my brain till its emersion in undimmed lustre. On the far, far horizon of the future I witnessed the birth of a new world; a world where sin

and sorrow were present, indeed, though shorn of much of their strength; a world whence the callous cruelty of past ages and the placid and bloodless effeminacy of the present had been banished with equal feelings of disgust; a world where pride in fatherland led men again to give up their lives in the wild tornado of battle, to build for themselves an imperishable monument of honour, and create an insatiable craving for self-sacrifice in the human heart; a world wherein help had become instinctive, and the need for it was restrained by unmurmuring acquiescence in the dictates of duty and prudence; a world that had shaken off the unhealthy figments of trance, and, by moderating its desires and realising its limitations, had rendered itself worthy of its inheritance in the actions and thoughts of the illustrious dead.

'That was the picture I saw, but it was distant—so distant!—and midway loomed the ghastly phantasm I could not think of without a shudder. Then it occurred to me that I must do what little lay in one man's power to abridge that interval; yes, even though it brought the consummation but one hour nearer, there lay my work. I could

find but one way to effect this. Hitherto, I had been living with extreme frugality, and had thus been able to return a large proportion of my yearly credit to the national funds. This, I saw, was to defeat the object now nearest my heart; whereas, if the surpluses were devoted to printing the rhapsodies that alone could protect me from the persecution dogging my steps, the funds which would otherwise go to swell the nation's credit, would now be expended. This idea aroused me to fresh activity; more feverously than ever I found myself compassing those effulgences of power so strangely disclosed to me. Always was I shaping the shifting scenes of a tragic play wherein I, impelled by a relentless destiny, was protagonist, and a superb woman, resplendent with tenderness and beauty, the hapless victim.

'In due time I left the industrial army, and henceforth there was nothing to interrupt my literary work. Meanwhile, volume after volume had been passing through the printer's hands, until the harvest of my imagination lay piled before me in boon lavishness. Those spare moments, when the forwearied brain could no longer respond to the exactions laid upon it, I spent with

my treasure. There alone was fellowship; there alone could a transient spasm of triumph ripple the dreary backwater of my existence; there alone came, in far-off suggestion, muffled clangours of the printing-house that wrapped my soul, as it were, in the spells of some masterful *berceuse*. As misers in past ages hoarded their gold, so now my precious books were gloated over. None left me; no man knew, no man should know, what was set down in them. Full well I was aware they contained things that the world would not willingly let die. True, but which world? A world descried in the far future; a world vivified from the dim azure of the past; but not this—no, not this world—which has handed me over, broken and dearn, to the utterance of one endless monody wherein it would be able to detect nothing but the ravings of blasphemy and impenitence.

'The work went forward, and its visible results accumulated year by year. In all my productions, although the minor characters vary, the two main personages reappear, as also does the *dénouement* in death and separation. How, indeed, could it be otherwise in these colourless times? That is my only experience worth recording, as

it is the only subject able to woo me from the fantastic terrors forever hanging, like a sword of Damocles, over my head. Then it was that there happened an accident which sent me forth into the world. I woke one night to find my house on fire. I arose, and barely escaped with life, all my treasures, the outcome of so much travail, perishing in the flames. I therefore seized the opportunity of leaving a town between which and myself there now remained not even the semblance of a tie. I was allowed to change my name, and by this means trusted to screen myself from the curiosity of the world in some far distant place. On seeing Johnsville, I obeyed a whim that arose within me, and, as it was a main object with me to devote as much from my credit as possible to the printing of my works, I declined to take a house, and in this I was clearly justified, although it gave umbrage to the good folks of the neighbourhood. Friends! you thought me churlish and eccentric; you could not imagine what I have felt, what I have seen, and yet live. Neither did you know how gladly I would have laid down for any one of you this burden of life that bends me with its weight to the dust. With lapse of time

my piece of ground was built over; and while cogitating as to a future course, the incident of the fire came to my aid, and I resolved that the flames should again eat up the produce of my brain, and, longing as I was for some change of scene, which yet can never bring any change in my lot, that I would again set forth in search of a new abiding-place.

'That is my story. And now, beneath what trampling soever of Time, down what labyrinths, horrisonous and mantled in durable shadow, may await me, I fare onward, dauntless and unresting, to the certain bourn, the divine euthanasy, decreed for all that is mortal. Then shall I once more see Agnes, see that sweetest, saddest face in celestial transfiguration, hear from those melodious lips the attestation of a love frustrated by the miscreative errors of this world, only to blossom again in unimaginable glory. This shall I see, this hear, unless such reunion be in mercy denied as insupportable by that which sprang from nothingness, and was accounted among the spoils of death. And if it be so, if silence and oblivion be indeed the end, I bow my head in adoration and say—that is best.'

CHAPTER VII

THE DUSTMEN AT HOME

I WOKE up next morning with a vivid impression of the story I had read overnight, and in the hope of finding Edith at her early occupation of arranging the flowers for the breakfast-table before the elder folk made their appearance, hurried downstairs, and was not disappointed, for as I entered the room, my Dulcinea ran to meet me with a merry laugh, holding in her hand a dark-red rose, which she at once proceeded to fix in my button-hole. When the flower was arranged quite to her satisfaction, I repaid the debt by borrowing a kiss from her tempting lips, and was about to suggest her acceptance of an I.O.U. for five hundred more in settlement of the whole matter, when the doctor and Mrs Leete came upon the scene, and our negotiation was brought to an end.

'I am sorry I shall again have to leave you this morning, Julian,' remarked Doctor Leete; 'a very important matter is before the committee of my guild, and yesterday's meeting was adjourned till to-day in order to dispose of the business. I trust you will be able to hit on some tolerable method of passing the time in my absence.'

I thought the good doctor just a trifle cold-blooded; 'tolerable method of passing the time,' indeed, when I had full opportunity of enjoying Edith's society! But, perhaps, my host was inclined to be quizzical, or had the modern lover changed from his prototype of my early time?

I said I contemplated a visit to the Gallery of European Art, about which we had been talking during breakfast.

'A very good idea,' said Doctor Leete, turning to his daughter, who immediately added, 'I was about to suggest my accompanying Julian, father.'

'And what do you say to that?' asked my host. Yes, he *was* quizzing me, that scarcely visible twinkle in his eye told me so.

'As I cannot have the advantage of your company, doctor,' I carelessly re-

marked, 'I will avail myself of Edith's kind offer.'

'Now mind,' said Doctor Leete, as we were leaving the house, 'I shall expect a full account of the pictures in the gallery, so do not let your attention be distracted by other matters.'

If my reader has not made the trial, I can assure him from personal experience that for a quiet flirtation there is no better place than a picture gallery or a museum — the latter is especially liable to be empty, by-the-bye—for the prim old ladies in starched ruffles do not seem to mind what is going on one bit, and as for the *Ichthyosauri*, the *Trilobites* and suchlike, they are merely items *pour rire*. But I trust this hint will not be acted on, at least to any great extent; otherwise it might get me into trouble with my good friends, the bespectacled votaries of the frivolous studies pursued there. No; on second thoughts, such places are *not* well adapted to the serious objects of life.

Edith was evidently of the latter opinion, and would allow no diversion of her attention from the pictures, a course in which I was forced to acquiesce; and as I claim

to be a fair judge of pictures myself, I was soon as much absorbed in them as she was. I noticed with satisfaction my companion's keen relish of the delightful feast set before us, and listened with deep interest to the pithy criticisms she was continually giving vent to; they were, indeed, a new revelation of this fascinating girl's many-sidedness. After some time an odd feeling came over me.

'If I am not mistaken,' I remarked, 'I have seen some of these pictures before, but it must be long, long ago. Yes, in the Louvre, at Dresden, London, Florence, Munich,' I went on, as I recognised masterpieces that had come under my notice during my travels in Europe. 'But how did they get here?' I asked in wonderment.

'That is a very simple matter,' replied Edith. 'In the old times the governments of Europe so impoverished themselves to keep up their armies and navies that they had at last to part with their works of art, of which a large proportion were purchased by American millionaires, only to pass into the nation's hands when the present social system was established.'

So, after all, some good had come out of millionaireism, though doubtless it would have surprised those financial magnates had they known what was to be the ultimate destination of their property.

On our way home we fell in with the doctor returning from his guild meeting, seemingly well pleased with what had transpired there. The good man greeted us with his usual heartiness, and addressing me, said,—

'I forgot to tell you that the dustmen hold their monthly At Home to-night. I can promise you a rare treat, Julian; in fact, there will be a perfect galaxy of talent at the club. Representatives of the arts, of science and literature, medicine, and the great industries are expected. Oates the poet will be there, likewise Barnwell the scientist, and Storiot, believed by many to be the greatest historian of all time, and I am told even Mr Doubleday the Mic[1] himself.'

'The Mic?' I said. 'Pardon me, doctor, but I do not understand.'

'A Mic, my dear boy, is a member of the International Council—M.I.C., you understand?'

[1] Pronounced Mick.

The prospect of meeting so many celebrated men pleased me very much, though I was disappointed on learning that, as it was a gentleman's night, Mrs Leete and Edith would not accompany us. I spent a delightful afternoon in the library with the ladies, making another discovery anent my *fiancée*, namely, that she was a highly accomplished reciter, her performances in that line putting mine, such as they were, entirely in the shade. We dined at the Elephant as usual, and after seeing the ladies home, Doctor Leete and I set out for the scene of the entertainment.

The club was brilliantly illuminated ; the outside a perfect blaze of all imaginable hues, blended with such art as to produce an effect in the highest degree pleasing, while in the interior of the building the light of day was rivalled, if not put to shame. A stream of guests was pouring in as we entered, and it was evident that the function would be largely attended. In the spacious and tastefully-decorated hall fountains were merrily playing, the plash of waters mingling in delightful unison with subdued strains of music that filled the hall. We were received by the president of the guild in a large and lofty

room, round which were ranged columns embellished with arabesque designs, and supporting a light gallery, in the panelling of which were pourtrayed figures emblematic of triumphs achieved in the arts and sciences. Doctor Leete introduced me to several of those present, and I was conversing with them when an usher came forward, crying, 'Room for the Mic, gentlemen, please,' and, amid the profound respect of the company, Mr Doubleday advanced towards the president, who stepped forward to receive his august visitor. A gong now sounded, and the president, accompanied by several men wearing sashes, the badge of office as I was told, took the chair which was standing on a raised daïs, whence, after a few formalities, he rose and began to address the assembly.

After expressing, as the representative of what he ventured to call a most important industry (hear, hear), the pleasure it gave him to see so brilliant a gathering met to do honour to his guild, he passed on to contrast the present condition of dustmen with their past, as elucidated by the researches of historians, and notably by the most distinguished of them all who, he was proud to say, was present with them that

evening; he alluded, of course, to Mr Storiot. (Loud applause.) From the researches of these gentlemen, then, it would appear that, in those unhappy times when men were sundered from their fellows, and arranged, by arbitrary selection bearing no manner of relation to their merits, in classes having little or no inter-communion, dustmen, although so necessary to the well-being of nations, occupied by no means an exalted position in society. (Marks of astonishment on all faces.) Incredible though it seemed, it was proved beyond doubt that their unfortunate predecessors had but little general instruction, and were absolutely ignorant of science in its higher branches, a fact to which were certainly due in no small degree the insanitary dwellings of those times, and the epidemics that so frequently decimated the population. The dustmen of those times appear to have been housed in a most unsatisfactory manner, and but little variety tempered the monotonous drudgery of their lives. (Cries of 'Shame!') They heard no music worthy of the name; such public museums and picture galleries as the world then boasted were to them almost inaccessible, and having had no preparation

for the enjoyment of it, literature, he need not say, never came within their cognisance. Their pleasures seem to have been almost entirely confined to the pot-house, as it was called; here, to the accompaniment of ribald jests, they fuddled themselves with a poisonous concoction known as small beer; sometimes they would be present at a low kind of entertainment given at a place called a music-hall; occasionally they might scramble for a seat in the cheapest part of the theatre, though, so vehement was the rush, it was only at the peril of life and limb they were able to obtain even this rarely-enjoyed relaxation. Dustmen were not accustomed to mingle in polite society, as the refined minority of those ages was called. Not one of the obsolete notabilities called princesses is recorded as having allied herself with a member of the profession. Nay, the very daughter of the man who brewed the liquor that was poisoning the people would have spurned, as immeasurably below her own level, the indispensable individual who removed from her father's premises the poison which, if suffered to remain there, would have caused disease and death. (Loud laughter.) At this point the president's eye happened to

fall upon me, and he immediately began a hedging operation with the evident object of removing from my mind any painful impression left there by his harangue. He bade his audience remember what society owed to the past; he reminded us how the dustman was absolutely unknown in primitive ages, and only came into existence with the dawn of that refinement now universally diffused among mankind. Particularly he extolled the nineteenth century, the century which had made such great strides in the science of sanitation; and then, in graceful terms, he alluded to my presence, and to the unique and providential way in which my life had been prolonged. This was followed by a glowing account of the position enjoyed by dustmen in the Golden Age, and of the important service performed by them for latter-day society. I should be loath to weary the reader with the details dwelt upon by the president with justifiable pride; it must suffice to say that, in addition to mere removal of refuse, no little knowledge of chemistry and sanitary engineering was mentioned as necessary to the equipment of a member of the Dustmen's Guild.

The meeting now broke up for conver-

sation and examination of the numerous objects on exhibition in various rooms of the club. As for me, I was at once honoured by the notice of no less a person than the Mic himself. After affably shaking my hand, and asking a few questions about the politics of the nineteenth century, the great man went on to remark, with affected humility, that he was only a politician himself.

'But bless me, Mr West,' he continued, 'how very different is my position from that of my predecessors. Had I been a nineteenth-century man, I suppose I should have incessantly run about with a carpet-bag, promising all sorts of things to all sorts of people. The position of a constable to one; to another a surveyorship of taxes; the vote of a third I should have secured by a veiled hint at the advantages of bimetallism, while assuring his monometallic neighbour that, in my opinion, society must necessarily rest upon a gold basis. Then the Irishman would have been won over by the avowal of my intention to assist in giving the lion's tail a violent twist, by which was meant, if I do not mistake, provocation to the British Government, though why that line of conduct should have commended itself to the

Irish I don't quite understand; perhaps, having failed in governing themselves, it was too bitter a reflection that others should have tried the experiment—and succeeded. Ha! ha! ha! curious times, Mr West, curious times.'

The Mic then explained to me some of the functions that fell upon his shoulders, and after giving me much interesting information, said in a low tone,—

'I think I shall soon be able to announce the accomplishment of a design I have worked at for years. It is a secret at present, so pray do not mention the matter. The prospect of being able to enjoy a cup of coffee every day will be immensely popular with all our people.'

Before I had time to ask what he meant, he whipped out his card-case, and, handing me a card, said hurriedly,—

'But I must bid you good-bye for the present. Mrs Doubleday will, I know, be most be happy to receive you, so I trust we shall see you in Commonwealth Avenue ere long.'

While talking with Mr Doubleday, I had been aware of a loud conversation, interspersed with peals of laughter, going on close

to me, and turning in the direction of the sound, I perceived a tall, pale-faced, long-haired individual standing in the middle of a group of men who were evidently tickled with what he was telling them. As I turned I heard him say,—

'I declare it is positively disgusting. What do you think happened the other night?'

An expression of amused expectancy was on every face as he looked round for a reply, but none was forthcoming.

'Well,' he continued, 'I was walking beside the Charles in full moonlight, and, as true as I stand here, I saw a scene exactly like one of my rhapsodies! To think that I should have lived to see it! Why, bless you, *anybody* can copy Nature, but that the ancient dame should start copying *me*, I thought rough, decidedly rough, I tell you.'

The satellites laughed, and one of them said,—

'Well, never mind. Only a few people walk by the Charles at night, and probably not one of them is aware of the act you so justly find fault with.'

'That's not the point,' was the answer; 'it's the principle of the thing I object to.

I vow I haven't touched a palette since. It's clear I've mistaken my calling; I should have been happier as a dustman.' And he sighed.

Here one of the group, looking towards me, spoke a few words to the artist in a low tone, whereupon the latter immediately advanced.

'And is this really Mr West, our pilgrim of the nineteenth century?' he asked, taking my hand and holding it in his grasp. 'Tell me, sir, oh, tell me, has this hand, now in mine, ever shaken that of Sneezer?'

'Sneezer?' I replied, trying to recollect, 'which Sneezer do you mean?'

'*The* Sneezer, Mr West. There's only one worth calling Sneezer at all.'

'I suppose you mean the artist,' I observed. Then I told him that I remembered to have had the privilege of shaking hands with Mr Sneezer on one occasion.

'Ah!' he ejaculated, in a tone of deep satisfaction, half letting my hand go. Then he again tightened his grasp and gave another deep 'Ah!'

'Sneezer was a man, sir,' he remarked, 'that, take him for all in all, mankind ne'er saw his like again, till I was entrusted with

the mission of convincing the world that nothing in it is absolutely *sui generis*.'

I bowed, while a suppressed titter convulsed the circle.

'I came, Mr West,' he continued; 'I saw nature; an overmastering passion got possession of me—a passion to improve on her clumsy attempts at effect, and I succeeded in improving on them.'

Here he looked round with a theatrical gesture.

'But I was alone, quite alone. Few people understood me even in part; none could do so entirely. "Alone I paced the shore of time's illimitable ocean," as that madman in Berryan's novelette says of himself—perhaps, though, you haven't read the story yet — and at that time I used to stretch forth helpless hands and cry, "My soul demands its peer," but there was no response to the cry. At last I went to Europe, and in a gallery there I discovered my *alter ego*: it was Sneezer. In three thousand years, sir, when the world has ripened, it will know how truly great we were; but not till then will it recognise us as absolutely without rivals in the subtle interpretation of effects that, being more

subjective than objective, elude the search of lesser men. As another point of resemblance we are both masters in the gentle art of—'

Here, however, an usher came forward, demanding passage for the exit of Mr Doubleday, and in the movement which ensued Sneezer's *alter ego* disappeared.

'The gentle art of self-esteem,' said a pleasant voice at my shoulder. 'Though, as I never had the honour of knowing Mr Sneezer, the remark applies to our amusing contemporary alone.'

The words were spoken by a handsome young fellow about my own age, who informed me that his name was Oates, at my service.

'Mr Oates the poet?' I asked.

My interlocutor owned to having committed a few volumes of verse. I expressed my regret at not having, so far, had time to read any of his work, adding that I was the more anxious to do so as Miss Leete thought very highly of it.

At this mention of my *fiancée's* name the colour mounted to his mobile features, while he hurriedly and a trifle confusedly congratulated me on my engagement, and quickly changed the subject.

He deplored the prosaic times in which we were living, when so few incentives to action remained, and so much of passion and emotion lay smothered beneath the icy conventions and the security of the Golden Age. The pathos of life, he averred, had well-nigh disappeared when the struggle for existence had been exchanged for an undoubtedly full though colourless enjoyment of it. In these times the rhythm of a stirring war-chant was sure to set people yawning, if, indeed, they refrained from expressions of disgust. Patriotism, he need not say, was moribund; and even love itself, now that it was shorn of the difficulties that in past ages had tested it as by fire—even love itself had become almost a jejune subject. As for humour, it still lived on, but in a deplorably decrepit state. Of course the mystery of the Why and the Whither remained as inscrutable as ever; and though certain of the new phases of society were capable of artistic treatment, he warned me that I should find the poetry of the present age vastly inferior to that of Victorian times.

I was anxious to know what posterity thought about the poetry of the nineteenth century, so I asked him. Mr Oates pro-

fessed keen admiration for many of the poets of that century.

'But,' he said, 'the greatest writer of them all appeared after you entered your trance. 'Let me see,' he continued; 'Masham lived from 1880 till 1932. He is an epitome, as it were, of the poetic art of those times, as he combines Tennyson's finish, Keats's fancy, the chastened dignity and pantheistic reverie of Wordsworth, and the hearty and dramatic directness characteristic of Browning, and all this interpenetrated by Swinburne's and Shelley's music, Poe's weird imagination, and the moral fervour pervading Whittier. Without doubt he was a colossal genius, and his only comedy, *As you Will*, and the two completed tragedies, *Love's Sacrifice* and *Prince Lionel*, have placed him, in the estimation of all sound judges, second to Shakespeare alone. But I must not monopolise you,' he added, suddenly breaking off, and with a hearty shake of the hand the poet left me, much to my disappointment, for I had become wildly excited by the news he had just communicated.

After I had stood for some minutes watching the brilliant throng, I was accosted by a little, nervous-mannered man, with an ex-

tremely prominent forehead, from which the long hair had been carefully brushed back.

'A sad world, Mr West,' piped the little man, 'a sad world. What St James of the Rialto would have thought of it I really tremble to inquire. Alas, alas!' he moaned, 'Cumberland died last night. Do you know, he and I were the only two that stood up for the Human Idea.'

I condoled with him on the loss of his friend Cumberland.

'There is a sense of material beauty,' he went on, his fine eyes flashing with excitement, 'a feeling for the recondite loveliness of nature manifested in its highest intensity, so far as I am aware, by four men alone—namely, Rousseau, Shelley, Ruskin and myself. While not exactly the same in any two of us, the sense I speak of betrays its presence in an unaccountable affection for forms of mingled beauty and terror, such as a glacier imperceptibly urging forward the pent tornado of its power, and the gloom investing, as with a mantle, the hoary shoulders of mountain ranges—those awful heavings of the earth's unquiet breast.'

Here he paused, and in a moment the fire went out of his eyes as he changed the

subject of conversation. For fully a quarter of an hour he delighted me with picturesque and effective talk about art and its relation to life, until, happening to pause, I was able to get a word in, and asked his opinion of Mr Sneezer's *alter ego*.

'That fellow!' he said, in a tone of annihilating scorn. 'Sneezer's *alter ego*, indeed! Pooh! Do you know what he does, Mr West? He flings paint wholesale on a canvas, then dabbles about with his brush, and if the effect produced has no counterpart in the world or out of it, he calls the thing a picture! Time after time I have protested against his being allowed to debase the public taste as he does. They ought to make a model of him; he would sit admirably for Don Quixote.'

After a moment's interval the subject of self again came uppermost in the mind of this pathetic patchwork of pregnant wisdom and childish vanity.

'When I was a boy, Mr West,' he continued, 'I used to ride on a donkey among the mountains; but my parents, fearful lest my neck might be broken, soon put an embargo on the exercise, otherwise I am convinced that I should have been to-day

the greatest worker in marble of this age. By-the-bye, perhaps you will be interested in knowing that I suffer from a tendency to over-eat myself with roast pork.'

Flesh and blood could not stand this. It was execrable of me, I know, but I simply fled into one of the retiring-rooms and laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks.

I had no sooner rejoined the company than I met Doctor Leete, who introduced me to a young friend of his. This gentleman was a chemist, as, after a few preliminaries, he asked me if I felt interested in chemistry, and on my replying in the affirmative, he began rapidly talking about a substance known as sulphalcyphoschlorpotmethyl, and the wonderful series of derivatives yielded by it. From time to time I gravely bowed as the facts came pouring in a perfect cataract from my informant's lips, who evidently imagined me to be as conversant with matters chemical as he himself was. At length I got an opportunity to undeceive him.

'Excuse me, Mr Lee'— the doctor had introduced him under that name—'much as I regret interrupting so much learning, I

must tell you that I have not a notion of what you are talking about.'

'Indeed!' he replied, with elevated eyebrows. 'You never heard of sulphalcyphoschlorpotmethyl $(CH_3)_{12}(SO_2)_5P(Al_2O_3)_7(OH)_{25}(KClO_3)$?'

'Nothing was known about it in my early time,' I stoutly affirmed.

'Dear me!' he replied; 'then it must have been discovered during the twentieth century. My knowledge of the history of chemistry always was weak, deplorably weak, in fact. Nevertheless, I feel sure you will be interested when I tell you that the substance in question is a most important one, as it is the basis of all the disinfectants now in use. I suppose, then, no one has told you about Shatter Day?'

I answered in the negative.

'From the composition of sulphalcyphoschlorpotmethyl you will readily understand how, under certain circumstances, untoward accidents might happen with it. The most frightful one occurred at Chicago some years ago, when a large quantity of nitric acid found its way into an immense reservoir of the boiling liquid. An awful explosion ensued, and in a couple of seconds the city was

brought to the ground. On the anniversary of that day, which is known as Shatter Day, services are held throughout the Union in memory of the unhappy thousands who perished in the catastrophe.'

But why dwell further on my experience of that memorable night? It will be sufficient to mention that, before the assembly broke up, I had seen nearly everything on exhibition in the club-rooms, and had spoken with most of the distinguished men then in Boston—with Mr Sweetser the preacher, and his colleague, Mr Barton; with naturalists, physicists, presidents of guilds, physicians, engineers, artists and musicians; and had even been honoured with a few words from the illustrious Storiot himself. The various exhibits were explained to me in turn by persons specially qualified for the task; but as these inventions all wore the garb of novelty, it will easily be conceived that my brain was in a perfect whirl long before the last room was reached. I remember being shown an electrical borer, by means of which the hardest rock could be penetrated at the rate of fifty feet an hour, and a locomotive fitted with a screw mechanism enabling it to travel at four times

the highest speed attained in the nineteenth century. Then there were flying machines, submarine boats, maps showing the complete geography of both Poles, carriages propelled by sunbeams, and among other wonderful things, one that specially interested me, namely a living Trilobite: this had been dredged from the South Pacific, and was allied to *Phillipsia*, one of the most recent fossil members of that remarkable group.

And when that brilliant function was exchanged for the silence of my chamber, and I found myself reflecting on the immense strides made by man since the days of my boyhood, a curious feeling of the unreality of it all got a firm grip of me. I was dreaming surely, and should wake up presently to find the world around me a mere figment of the imagination. But no! the thought was too painful; for then there would be no Edith Leete, and without her life would now be unendurable. And in the blessed assurance that it was not a dream, I fell asleep.

Next morning, as I stood on Doctor Leete's doorstep, a dust-cart drove up, and a person in the garb of a dustman got down from it. His features were begrimed with dirt, and almost beyond recognition.

Hastily drawing on a pair of gloves, the man ran up the steps and exclaimed,—

'Good morning, Mr West; I hope you enjoyed the conversazione last night.'

I was about to ask what in the name of the ten-thousand virgins he meant by addressing me, when I fortunately recollected myself, and after a moment's scrutiny, recognised in the dustman my chemical acquaintance of the previous night. While we were shaking hands, Mrs Leete appeared on the doorstep and told Mr Lee there was a smell coming from the dustbin. Bowing politely, my acquaintance expressed his regret, and on the lady suggesting a visit to the obnoxious bin, we all three proceeded to inspect it. Arrived there, Mr Lee inserted his head, and sniffed deeply several times.

'Yes, Mrs Leete,' he said, sniffing between the words, 'I must have made a mistake. That smell is certainly caused by the presence of toluoethylaldehyde, and the bin requires disinfecting with diplioxynthyl. The disinfectant I used on the last occasion was triphosfersulphoxyhydrate on the erronous supposition of there being tetrallylhydrosulphide in the bin. The

matter shall have my immediate attention, Mrs Leete!'

'Good heavens!' I thought, 'what learning!' and then a wave of depression swept over me. If a mere dustman was so accomplished, what in the world would be the position assigned to me by that terrible labour-bureau, before which I knew I should be summoned, and probably at an early date. I didn't at all like the prospect, I tell you.

CHAPTER VIII

I ASK CERTAIN QUESTIONS AND GET STRANGE ANSWERS

After meeting the poet Oates, I was naturally desirous of reading some of his verses. So going to the library, I took down a volume of his poetry, which I chanced to open at the following ballade :—

A BALLADE OF BEAUTY.

'Blithe as Maytime ; fresh as air ;
Bountiful as harvest days ;
Sanctity did never wear
Holier light than round her plays :
Queen without a peer always
In the dance's devious whirl ;
Who could ever warble praise
Worthy of the modern girl ?

'Large-wrought life and judgment fair
All her rhythm of speech betrays ;
And her strong soul seems as 'twere
Deep, deep sea, whereover strays,
Quickening its delicious bays,
Mirth in many a rippling curl ;
Who could utter worthy praise,
Warbling of the modern girl ?

'Brain with subtle force to share
Latter learning's every phase;
Mien the countermand of care;
Feats of magic in a gaze
Whose enchantment oversways;
Solace tender; throat of merle;
Who could utter worthy praise
On that theme, the modern girl?

'Haunt of joy; love's wildering maze;
Precious as was never pearl;
None could ever warble praise
Worthy of the modern girl.'

I thought the little piece rather pretty, and after reading it aloud to Mrs Leete, told her my opinion.

'And whom do you think Mr Oates had in his mind when he wrote the ballade?' asked Mrs Leete.

I couldn't even guess.

'Well,' said she, it is a secret, but there will be no harm telling it to you. The piece was inspired by Edith; Mr Oates assured me so, just before he proposed to her.'

'Mr Oates proposed to Edith?' I exclaimed, with mingled feelings of astonishment, triumph and jealousy. Heavens! The poet was a handsome, attractive fellow, and had gained a position in the world, and yet the delicious reversion of Edith's love had fallen to me!

'But, my dear Mrs Leete,' I said, 'if the subject be an allowable one, I should so like to know why Mr Oates failed in his suit.'

'Oh,' replied the lady, 'he is such an inveterate flirt, and besides was too hasty. I do not say that Edith would have accepted him; indeed, I incline to think she would have refused in any event; but the fact of his speaking before there was the slightest hint of her giving him the yellow ball took away any chance he might otherwise have had.'

'And what might the yellow ball be?' I inquired.

'The yellow ball, Julian; don't you really know what that means? Why, Edith told me she gave you one herself!'

Then I remembered how, on that happiest of all days, the day when I declared my passion, I had found a small ball of yellow wool in my coat-pocket, though, of course, I didn't in the least know how it got there or what its presence might signify.

'But what does the ball mean?' I asked, after mentioning the circumstance.

'You astonish me, Julian,' said Mrs Leete. 'Indeed, your question seems as extraordinary

as would be one about the use of a knife or a spoon. Surely the nineteenth century girl gave a yellow ball to the man she was in love with, did she not?'

'Most decidedly not,' I answered, 'neither a yellow ball, nor a red bat, blue stumps, nor green pads—nothing, in fact.'

'Then what means had she of declaring her preference?' asked the lady, in astonishment.

'None whatever,' I replied. 'To give such encouragement to a man as I understand is conveyed by the yellow ball would have been considered unmaidenly in the highest degree.'

'Unmaidenly indeed! what an idea! And what did the poor thing do to reveal her secret to the favoured cavalier?'

'Nothing,' I replied. 'Her lips were closed, and the secret died with her unless the man asked her to reveal it.'

'Oh, those cruel times!' she exclaimed. 'How hard, too, it must have been for the man. He could never have been certain, then, as to the result of his suit?'

'No! He took a leap in the dark; say, rather, he footed a narrow causeway with a precipice on either side, the cowardice of

silence and the humiliation of possible rejection. But men sometimes propose without having the ball given to them; for instance, Mr Oates did.'

'Quite so; but the act savours of presumption, and is very likely to prejudice the suit instead of furthering it. So you did not know what was meant by the yellow ball you found in your pocket? How very extraordinary!' and Mrs Leete laughed heartily.

That evening, as we sat on the housetop, I took the opportunity of putting some further questions to Doctor Leete on matters that had awakened my curiosity. The doctor was always ready with his answers; and if my latter moods were too Socratic, as I sometimes feared they must have seemed, the good man showed no sign of thinking so. In answer to my request, he now gave me the following short sketch of his life:—

'After leaving college at the age of twenty-one, my first three years were passed, as I have already told you, in the performance of a waiter's duties at the Elephant. I was then drafted into the State bacteriological laboratory, where I remained four years. However, as I did not succeed

in making any discoveries, I transferred myself to the chemical department of the State University, and after two years of preliminary study there, commenced some researches on aniline dyes. In this quest I met with a little success; but on the University Council intimating their dissatisfaction with the paucity of my discoveries, I passed over to the physical side. Unfortunately, the science of physics never had much attraction for me; nevertheless I persevered at my new calling for four years. I was now perilously near the age—thirty-five—after which one can no longer change one's profession, and a wise, because irrevocable, decision had become absolutely necessary. After mature consideration, therefore, I entered myself as a student of medicine, and when the prescribed six years of study had expired, I commenced practice, being then in my fortieth year. At forty-five I was, of course, relieved from duty. *Voilà tout*,' and my host smiled.

I did not say so, but I could not help thinking the State must be fabulously wealthy that could support a man till his fortieth year, and permit him to live in retirement, surrounded by comforts, after only five years of

effective service. I also did not understand how it was such a wide choice of professions had been enjoyed, and I asked the reason.

'The reason is clear enough,' replied Doctor Leete. 'My record of service as a waiter was such a splendid one. In all those three years I was never known to spill a drop of gravy on a lady's dress, neither did anything fall from my hands; indeed, though I ought not to mention it, my fame is so securely based, that when a young waiter specially distinguishes himself for carefulness and alacrity, prophetic utterances are hazarded as to his likelihood of proving a "Leete."'

'But what in the world has that to do with your frequent change of profession?' I asked.

'Everything, my dear boy. Whenever I wished to change my calling, it was necessary only to produce my excellent college certificates and waiter's testimonials to secure one of the vacant places in the profession I desired to enter.'

The logic of the thing was far from apparent; still, it was to be presumed that the system answered the test of experience, though how it could do so I failed to perceive.

'To change the subject, doctor,' I said, 'coffee, I understand, is no longer an every-day drink. I should like to know why?'

'Truth to tell,' replied Doctor Leete, with some reluctance, 'our system has — well, broken down in respect of coffee. It happened in this wise. There was nothing to check the importation of the berries, until the exporting countries took it into their heads to supply themselves with the products they had hitherto obtained from us in exchange. You are, of course, aware of there being within the tropics a large acreage of elevated plateau country suitable for the culture of wheat and other cereals. Well, as those uplands came successively under the plough, our export of flour diminished *pari passu*, until it reached the vanishing point. So, too, with minerals. When the various governments took upon themselves the regulation of labour, attention was soon turned to the immense bodies of ore of various kinds locked up within the mountain ranges of the tropics. Manufactories thus arose on every hand, with the result that for some years past the United States have ceased supplying hardware to foreign countries; and since they do not require our goods,

we cannot command theirs, for those tropical populations will not work for humanity, but only for themselves. It is very sad.'

So far from wondering at this, I thought it only natural under the circumstances, and told Doctor Leete so, adding that he would probably share my opinion did he know what work under a tropical sun means. Nevertheless, Mr Doubleday had apparently solved the problem, at least he thought he had. But how?

I had been greatly exercised about Jabez Scroggs's prophecy as to the terminability of the Golden Age, but having no figures to test the statement by, I was not in a position to decide whether the calculations were or were not correct. In the hope, therefore, of getting some information from Doctor Leete, I said,—

'The other day we estimated the wealth of the American community towards the end of the nineteenth century at three hundred and fifty dollars per head. Could you give me an idea what it is now?'

'It is naturally much higher now, since a whole army of useless distributors have been dispensed with, not to mention other non-productive classes, such as moneyed people,

soldiers, sailors, and so forth. Ramsbottom, indeed, considers the national wealth to be ten times as great as it was a hundred years ago.'

'We may therefore take it at three thousand five hundred dollars per head. And what is the population?'

'About a hundred and fifty millions.'

'Dear me!' I replied, after setting down some figures; 'then the total mounts up to no less than five hundred and twenty-five thousand million dollars. Surely every available corner of these States must be cultivated to its utmost capacity to yield such a return as that?'

'No,' said the doctor, 'there are still a few blocks of virgin land, especially in the central and western States.'

'And is all the earth peopled in the same degree?'

In some countries the population is still denser.'

'And when will the end be?' I asked, forgetting Edith's injunction not to mention such a subject to her father.

'The end!' exclaimed Doctor Leete, in a startled voice. 'What end do you mean, Julian?'

'Well,' I replied, 'if the earth yields now almost as much food as it can, there must be times of famine ahead, unless indeed population were to remain stationary instead of increasing.'

'My dear fellow,' said the doctor, 'why trouble your head with distressing questions? There is a small and obscure sect preaching some such doctrine, but the wretched bigots only succeed in making laughing-stocks of themselves. The end, indeed! As if mankind, having once found the perfect way of happiness, would ever think of straying from it. Should population get ahead of food-production, no doubt some means of coping with the problem will be forthcoming. But this is the Golden Age, and it would at once cease to be that were we to worry ourselves about the future. No, posterity must take care of itself, and, depend upon it, will know how to meet its difficulties as we have known how to deal with ours.'

As I was entering my bedroom, Doctor Leete brought to me a couple of newspapers bearing that day's date, and I unfolded them in the hope of learning something about what was passing in the world. The *National Gazette* came first to hand; but to

my surprise its columns contained only lists of names, with indications of the positions to be filled by their owners during the ensuing year; this was, in fact, the announcement of the annual re-grading in the industrial army. The present being the fifty-second list, I decided that the *Gazette* was not an organ to my taste, so I turned to the other paper, which proved to be the *Elephant Ward Gazette.* Was there any news in it? Well, it was filled with parochial chatter as to roads, delivery-tubes, and so forth, and there were long notices about Brown's new baby and the wedding of Miss Jones, with touching biographies of defunct Smiths and Robinsons; but as one cannot exist on such Bumble's diet alone, I soon felt bored. At length my eye was caught by the following telegram from Paris:—

'The International Council met here to-day, and investigated the complaint of the British delegates concerning a consignment of eggs from Italy. After expert evidence had been tendered, two dozen sample eggs were broken in basins and handed round; whereupon it was unanimously decided that the eggs, which had been sent as "very

fresh," were not even that; consequently the destruction of the whole batch was ordered, and its replacement by an equal number in sound condition. The Council leave on Friday in their fleet for the Pribyloff Islands, where they will ascertain whether the new punkahs for fanning the captive seals are working satisfactorily.'

And this is what the world has come to, I thought, while a five-mile yawn spread itself over my features. Then I looked back with regret on the old times when news flashed along the wires, hour after hour, of battles in the field and in chancelleries, of rumours and strikes and seditions—all the stirring incidents of a restless and alert society. My case seemed not unlike that of St Simeon Stylites who had to work his way to the *ne plus ultra* of beatification without the aid of contemporary chronicles to give a fillip to existence. Doubtless the two cases were similar, with two trifling exceptions; for I required a laundress (and I *got* one only too soon, as the reader will learn), while no prospect of saintship loomed before me as a reward for my endurance.

CHAPTER IX

A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, FOLLOWED BY A SCANDALOUS SYNTHESIS OF OPINIONS

THE election of a president was looming in the immediate future, and accustomed as I had been during my earlier time to the scenes accompanying the quadrennial contest, it was not without surprise that I failed to observe any outward indication of the coming event. Not only was there no excitement among the people, not a procession even, with its bands of music, but platforms, orators, frantic efforts to woo notoriety, all were conspicuous by their absence. Talk, of course, there was, and surmises were freely exchanged as to the person upon whom the honour would fall; but the election was preluded by a restraint and quiet dignity befitting the occasion, and in this respect I could not help comparing the Golden Age and the nineteenth century, much to the latter's disadvantage.

With the good-natured desire — already so frequently manifested—of giving me the opportunity to see whatever might be worth the trouble, Doctor Leete proposed that I should accompany him to Washington, he having secured two tickets of admission to the Capitol. Needless to say, I accepted his offer.

At length the eventful day arrived, and a large party of citizens, including some electors among them, took their seats in a special train for the seat of Government. During the journey occurred another of those hitches seemingly unavoidable in so complicated a system of society. I noticed small groups of houses at regular intervals by the side of the line, and as stoppages were made at these places from time to time, I asked what they were. Doctor Leete explained that the houses were inhabited by railway employees, who were thus enabled to enter upon their duties without loss of time, and to reach their homes directly the day's work was finished, the train being brought to a standstill whenever the change of servants had to be made. As an engine-driver's work was disagreeable, and not free from danger, a day of thirty minutes

only was required of these people by the Administration, and it was thus necessary to take a fresh driver every half-hour. We had travelled some time, and were approaching Washington, when the train drew up at one of those wayside stopping-places and the driver set to work blowing his whistle. After some little delay, a boy came from one of the houses, and, as we afterwards learnt, told the driver his father was too poorly to do duty that day. A short time afterwards, round came the driver to apprise the passengers of the cause of the delay, adding that an emergency driver had been telegraphed for and would doubtless reach the spot with all convenient speed. He assured us there was no risk of an explosion, since the fire had been drawn. As for him, his day's work was done; he was at home, and, of course, intended to remain there.

My fellow-passengers took the delay in good part, the idea of a man working double hours for the public convenience being, as Doctor Leete whispered to me who had hinted at such a course, quite inadmissible; for such an act, besides being unfair to the worker, tended to disorganise the State regulation of labour, and on that account

it was forbidden. So we all settled ourselves down to wile away the inevitable interval. Fortunately there was no chance of our missing the election, as we had electors on board, and the function could not begin without them.

Some forty minutes elapsed before a pilot engine arrived with a new driver for our train, after which the fire had to be relighted. The delay was thus a long one, and when we at last reached our destination, the Capitol was already packed with a vast crowd of electors and spectators.

The proceedings were opened by an official reading the minutes of the meeting called for electing the outgoing president, whereupon that functionary (he was seated in a chair behind which were grouped several men who, Doctor Leete told me, were former presidents) rose to deliver an address, having for its subject, as I soon perceived, a retrospect of the events that had occurred during his tenure of office. But with all respect to the august individual, those references to trade relations, complaints to the Grand International Council and multitudinous petty revisions of the labour regulations in no way appealed to my higher nature

as a man and a citizen. Indeed, the whole business savoured strongly to my mind of a nineteenth century vestry meeting, and was not a whit more interesting. The speech was brought to a close by a stirring peroration on the inestimable benefits conferred by the Golden Age upon mankind.

The election of the new president was then taken in hand. The custom was, I had been told, to place on the top flight of steps leading up to the Capitol a box for the reception of applications for the presidency. The outgoing president now said in a solemn voice, 'Fetch the box,' and two of his *entourage* marched slowly down the hall to the tune of 'The Star-spangled Banner,' the strains of which filled the building. Slowly they returned with their precious burden, and deposited it on a table in front of the president. All was now expectation; the electors settled themselves in criticising attitudes, and the clerks prepared to take down the names of the candidates as they were read out.

Doctor Leete here whispered to me, 'In spite of there being no fuss, no demonstrations, you will see how many of our

citizens covet the honour of the chief magistracy.'

I did see, and very shortly.

'Open the box,' said the president, handing the key to one of the two bearers.

The box was opened. There was a pause. Evidently the contents were being carefully scrutinised. The person who had opened the box now mounted the platform and whispered a few words to the president. Amid much lifting up of hands a hurried consultation ensued among the men on the platform, and then, to the profound astonishment and chagrin of all, came a startling announcement.

Not one application had been received! There was no candidate for presidential honours!

The assembly was in a state of effervescence. Murmurs arose on every side. It was a scandal, a disgrace; some foolish people actually hissed, as if that could mend matters. As for poor Doctor Leete, his discomfiture was so painful that I hastily turned from him and pretended to be reading the book I had brought with me.

Affairs having got into such an extraordinary muddle, it was a matter of the

utmost urgency to discover some way out. Various measures were proposed, but none of them met with favour until one of the delegates moved that the outgoing president be requested to retain office for the ensuing year, and the chief magistrate reluctantly yielding his consent, the motion was carried unanimously, there being, as I was told, an article of the constitution expressly sanctioning such prolongation of the presidential term.

When we were alone Doctor Leete gave vent to his disappointment, expressing a fear lest the fiasco we had just witnessed might have lowered my opinion of the Golden Age.

'Not at all, my dear doctor,' I said reassuringly. 'To tell the truth, the wonder to me is that anybody should volunteer for such a position. The president, as you before explained, is selected from among those who have already passed through the industrial army and earned a right to enjoy their *otium cum dignitate*. Now, when he is elected, what does this retired citizen find himself confronted with? To judge from the address we heard to-day, he is immersed in a crowd of petty and vexatious details that must largely neutralise the advantages,

if there be any, of his position. Now, in my early time, the president was, as it were, the voice of the nation; to his hands were entrusted its many interests and, above all, its honour. National interests, such as they now are, seem to me nothing but interests of trade, and these are controlled by the Grand International Council; while as for national honour, questions concerning that cannot arise, because dishonour, if I understand rightly what you have told me from time to time, is no longer known. The president of to-day is, in reality, nothing more than a glorified beadle; and retirement has been made so secure and so seductive that, for the life of me, I cannot see what possible inducement can prompt any person's application for the office. I go by what I know of human nature, which you tell me has not changed; and did that statement of yours require confirmation, to-day's proceedings would fully confirm it.'

Only the next day—it was a Sunday—another accident happened, and a highly ludicrous one too. Doubtless it was an excellent invention, that by which people sitting in their homes had only to touch a button, whereupon music and the spoken

word were made audible all over a room; though to an old-fashioned mind like my own, what was worth hearing at all seemed worth the expenditure of a short journey to compass the gratification. Without doubt, too, it argued liberality on the part of Doctor Leete and his neighbours, that connection had been established between their houses and quite a number of churches and halls, since by lending an ear to all opinions, one is saved that provincialism in thought and feeling against which a great critic of the nineteenth century was wont to take up his parable. But the advantage of such an invention as that I am alluding to would be neutralised if, owing to a breakdown of the complicated machinery whereby alone it could be worked, a multitude of opinions should reach one's ears at the same moment, and this was precisely what happened.

The facts were these. I was sitting in the music-room with Edith, who, when the hour of divine service arrived, took me round the room, explaining in a few crisp sentences the views promulgated in the various meeting-places with which Doctor Leete had established communication. After the whole series had been thus touched upon, I had

expressed a preference for a sermon from my *fiancée's* own lips, suggesting as a text the apostolic injunction, 'Love one another,' and Edith, with a charming blush, had given her assent. However, no sooner were we settled in a cosy corner than all the telephones began talking at once, and we were surrounded by a babel of voices. In the immediate vicinity of each telephone, as might be expected, only one voice predominated: it was near the centre of the room that the united efforts of the various preachers fell upon the ear with equal intensity. Here there was a most singular, and, indeed, scandalous blending of views. For instance, I distinctly heard the following sentences:—

'The holy father is—the abomination of desolation—the apostle tells us—this is the age of Reason—let us pursue the subject—with the jawbone of an ass—unless men repent—how could they otherwise obtain command over Nature—the archbishop expressly declares—he is no more responsible for his belief than for the colour of his skin.'

With what other monstrous statements that wicked telephone was chargeable we did not stop to inquire. Running out on to the street, we found the neighbours gathered

there in a state of much excitement. Some were angry, others appeared shocked, but to the rest of us, including Edith and myself, the ludicrous side of the *contretemps* appealed most forcibly, and we simply shrieked with laughter.

Of course, the defect was soon made right, and our neighbours were able to enjoy their sermon in peace; by the way, we also enjoyed *our* sermon, I remember. Nevertheless, here was another proof that all was not so perfect in the Boston of A.D. 2000 as I had been led to suppose. Truth to tell, for my eyes the glamour of the Golden Age was a rapidly-vanishing quality; and as for the gold, I began to have serious apprehensions lest a quantity of base metal might somehow have got mixed with it.

CHAPTER X

I AM ALLOTTED A CALLING

At length the day I had looked forward to with so much anxiety arrived, and I set out with my kind friend the doctor to obey a summons citing me before the labour-bureau for the purpose of being enrolled in the industrial army. From time to time Doctor Leete had endeavoured to allay my apprehensions on the subject, and he had, I know, sedulously made interest for me in order to my appointment as lecturer on the nineteenth century. But in spite of the good doctor's encouragement, I did not feel at all confident about the result of the ordeal through which I was about to pass. The bureau would naturally require evidence of my qualifications for lecturing, and supposing such evidence were unsatisfactory? I shuddered at the prospect, and heartily wished myself clear of the whole business.

The bureau consisted of twelve gentlemen

and a president, the latter a stern-visaged man of deliberate speech and imposing manners. At desks raised round the tribunal sat a number of clerks. The doctor and myself were introduced by an usher into a sort of dock, where we were accommodated with seats. My appearance had evidently been looked forward to with interest, for the public galleries were crowded with spectators, who greeted us with clapping of hands and stamping of feet.

In formal tones the president enlarged upon the unique occasion of that meeting. Here was a person born far back in the nineteenth century, who, as they all now so well knew, had lain in a sort of trance lasting nearly a hundred and thirteen years, from which their highly-esteemed fellow-citizen, Doctor Leete, had been the providential means of resuscitating him. Wonderful, however, as that fact about Mr West was, another circumstance, to the people of that age more wonderful still, must be mentioned. Mr West had never in his life done a day's work. Because his grandfather had succeeded in amassing the metal with which commodities were in those days purchased, their visitor had been able to evade the main

object of existence, namely, service to one's fellow-men, by placing his inherited property out at interest, as it was called. Not that he wished to impute any blame for such an action; far from it; for, however revolting the practice might seem to them, it was resorted to by people of unimpeachable integrity, and, indeed, in those times to have money invested in safe securities was the only absolute safeguard against poverty and starvation.

Mr West's position, he continued, was an anomalous one, and the matter in all its bearings had been carefully considered by the Administration; in this they had received assistance, he was glad to say, from their visitor himself, who, with a manly spirit that did him honour, had placed his services at the disposal of the State. The object of their meeting that day was to apply the law to Mr West's case by allotting him a position in the industrial army.

The president now called upon me to say what calling I thought myself best adapted to.

'My friend, Doctor Leete, sir,' I replied, 'tells me there is a prospect of my being appointed as lecturer on the nineteenth

century, a period, I am given to understand, about which people nowadays are highly curious. If that proposal be favourably entertained by this honourable bureau, I can promise performance of my duties to the utmost of whatever ability I may be endowed with.'

'Lecturer on the nineteenth century!' exclaimed the president, with lifted eyebrows. 'I do not remember your communicating with me on the subject, Doctor Leete.'

'No, Mr President, I did not,' said the doctor. 'In fact, I thought it more respectful to you not to mention the matter until the bureau should meet to consider it. However, if I may be permitted to express an opinion, I think it would be highly desirable to give Mr West the post he solicits. He has, on many occasions, enlightened my ignorance of the century in question, and I feel sure the nation at large will be glad to have the opportunity of hearing him.'

A whispered consultation now ensued between the members of the bureau, whereupon the president said,—

'We are unanimously of opinion that Mr West's application is a reasonable one. Nevertheless, we deem it right for the

applicant to satisfy us as to his possession of sufficient knowledge for the post. Mr Thompson, fetch the nineteenth volume of Storiot, if you please,'—this to a clerk.

My anticipation was only too true, and I felt disconcerted at the prospect before me.

'Now, Mr West,' said the president, turning over the leaves of the volume, 'be so kind as to give us an account of the commerce between these States and Great Britain at the latter part of the nineteenth century.'

I shuffled about uneasily—however, with a little boldness, I might perhaps get through.

'There was a good deal of diplomatic interchange,' I answered. 'We imported the argument and manners, sending rhetoric and brusqueness over there. In goods our exports were corn and other foodstuffs, cotton—'

'Yes, yes,' interrupted my questioner, 'that is all very true, but what I want to know is the volume of trade between the two countries.'

Here I was gravelled, absolutely gravelled. For a moment I thought all was over, then a brilliant suggestion occurred to me.

'By no means a small item was pirated

volume,' I began, trying to force a smile; but a frown appearing on every face caused me to subside. The committee seemed actually ashamed of their forefathers' 'smartness,' and were obviously as obtuse to the joke as British authors and publishers had themselves been. I must try a new tack to avoid getting swamped.

'The volume of trade was not accurately known when I entered into the trance,' I said with the utmost hardihood.

'That answer convinces me of your inability to lecture on the commerce of the nineteenth century,' gravely answered the president. 'I have on the page before me statistics relating to the volume of trade between the two countries dating from long anterior to the year 1887. Your ignorance on this point is, however, no insuperable objection. I will now ask a question to which you will doubtless have a ready answer. In what relation did Great Britain and France stand with regard to the "French shore" of Newfoundland towards the close of the nineteenth century?'

'I really don't know,' I replied, 'and, what is more, I never met anyone who did. Indeed, I remember having heard doubts

expressed whether the two governments themselves understood the position.'

'Humph!' ejaculated the president, 'it is stated here clearly enough. Then, after a pause, he continued, 'Well, try once more. How were men obtained for the coal mines in England?'

'In the usual way,' was my reply; 'at least I never heard anything to the contrary.'

Here the president read from the volume before him as follows:—

'"In the reign of James I. we find in operation an astounding statute authorising a colliery owner in want of labour to lay hands upon the passer-by, and compel him to work underground. In the absence of any reference to a repeal of this odious law, I am reluctantly compelled to conclude that the comparative enlightenment of the England of the nineteenth century was disgraced by a peculiarly repulsive form of slavery." What do you say to that, Mr West?'

'I know nothing about the law or its repeal,' I answered with some warmth; 'but in spite of that, I affirm without hesitation that Mr Storiot is quite in the wrong, and, moreover, this is not the first time I have had to correct that author's blunders!'

The whole court looked aghast at my effrontery.

'Storiot wrong?' exclaimed the president. 'Do I really understand you to say that our illustrious contemporary has made mistakes in that monumental work of which we are all so proud?'

'Undoubtedly,' I replied, feeling myself on safe ground at last, 'and I should like to give a few instances, if you will allow me.'

'That is quite unnecessary, Mr West,' replied the president, with a wave of the hand. Evidently my statement passed the limits of credibility.

Hereupon the members of the bureau again whispered among themselves. There was trouble in Doctor Leete's face, and I was only too conscious that my unsatisfactory answers were the cause. After a few minutes the president broke silence.

'We regretfully decide against Mr West's application, as we find him not sufficiently acquainted with nineteenth-century lore to justify us in appointing him to the lectureship. We therefore deem it our duty to assign the applicant a position in the industrial army. The employment clerk will be good enough to read out the list of vacancies.'

'I find only two vacancies at present, sir,' answered the clerk. 'One is that of an ordinary hand on the smack *Massachusetts*, engaged in the Newfoundland cod fishery; the other an apprentice to the Sewerage Board.'

'I regret, Mr West, there should be so small a range for your choice,' said the president. 'Which of these honourable callings do you prefer?'

Disgust is not the word to express what I felt. But it seemed as though the honour of the nineteenth century were at stake, so I determined not to show the white feather. Yet, what a choice! The idea of going as a fisherman was highly distasteful, and, moreover, it would involve long absences from Edith, and living in an atmosphere of fog and cod's liver. But the alternative—working in filthy sewers — was that any better? Then it occurred to me that I could be nothing now to Edith; that all my forecasts of the future had been but fantastic dreams. Careless what became of me, I said I would be a sewer-man.

I left the bureau in a state of mind truly pitiable. Why had my life been prolonged if this was what Fate had in store for me?

Smarting with exasperation, I cursed the Golden Age and all its works; nay, I even included poor Doctor Leete in my vituperation. He might, at least, have foreseen the possibility, the high probability even, of some such thing happening to me. Why, then, had he recalled me to life when the more merciful course would have been to allow the flickering lamp to expire?

'Oh, Edith! Edith!' I exclaimed, in a passion of despair. 'Never to see your sweet face beside me! Eternal banishment from the presence that has become a necessity of my existence! Oh! I cannot bear it! I will not bear it!'

No, I must see Edith once more. I must tell her how that infernal bureau had thrust itself been us, and then—.

Edith was in the library. She received me with a sunny smile, and came forward with a gesture I well understood—too well indeed now.

'I have no right,' was all I could say in a hoarse voice, as the little arch—a perfect Cupid's bow—fashioned itself on her lips.

'What is the matter, Julian, dear?' she asked in an alarmed tone. 'Have you failed to get the lectureship?'

Forgetful of the dictates of politeness, I sank down upon a chair in my anguish. Edith at once seated herself on my knee, the little face nestling against my shoulder.

'Yes,' I groaned, 'all is over between us. They have made me a sewer-man. I came to tell you, and now I go away for ever.'

'Why?' she asked, fingering one of my coat buttons. There was a slight tremor in the voice, and her hands shook ever so slightly.

'Why?' I said. 'Because no man with a spark of right feeling would think of dragging a girl down to his own level. Working every day in those sewers, a fit mate indeed I should be for you! My poor girl, the thought is horrible, horrible, yet we must part. If you yourself do not see the necessity, I am sure your parents will,' and the tears came into my eyes.

A silvery laugh broke from her lips.

'What a funny idea!' she said. 'What a silly, silly boy to distress himself without a cause.' She was caressing my hair with her fingers. 'Of course he will be good, oh, so good! Then he will be promoted; then an inspectorship will be given him, and so higher and higher he rises until he dons

the red ribbon itself! And he talks of dragging me down to his level. What level can a girl be dragged down to nowadays, I should like him to tell me. And if he had obtained that lectureship, I suppose I should have dragged him down to my level,' and she laughed.

'What *do* you mean, darling?' I answered, kissing the upturned lips. I knew it was wrong, for I felt sure the doctor and Mrs Leete would intervene and do their utmost to separate us; and as it would be years and years before I should be regarded as in any way an equal match for the peerless girl, how could I expect her to be true to me all that time? It was beyond reason.

'It is a little secret about myself,' she replied, rising to leave me. When she reached the door she blew me a kiss, and said,—

'I did not tell you before for fear of alarming your nineteenth-century notions. During the past few weeks I have been enjoying my vacation; this afternoon I return to work. *I am a laundress!* Good-bye, dear boy,' and she vanished.

CHAPTER XI

THE AWAKENING

A LAUNDRESS! My sweet little *fiancée*, the consummate flower of the age, queen of my life, resplendent in her crown of incomparable maidenhood, and—a laundress!

The ground was slipping away beneath my feet. About my path, darkened now more than ever, came the sound of mocking voices, chiding me for having treated as realities the visions of happiness I had so easily given myself up to. 'Alas! alas!' I cried, over and over again, as a feeling of utter despair took possession of me. My old love had died years and years ago; she had become kin to the things of fable, and now all the romance of my newer life must suddenly crumble away. But despair soon gave way to an outburst of wrath that lashed me into frenzy as I thought of Edith.

What? Those easy-going curs call themselves men, when, by working longer hours they could relieve the mothers of their children from the servitude of outside labour —could leave them free for those sacred duties which are the glory of womanhood? Edith should not be weighted with such a burden, that I vowed. Then I remembered the bonds and share certificates, thousands and thousands of dollars' worth, locked up in my safe. Alas! they were useless; not a loaf would all that property purchase now. Besides, how could I hope to set at naught the dictates of that terrible labour-bureau, of which my poor girl was as much the slave as I myself? The fingers of destiny were at my throat, and, do what I could, to lessen their hold upon me was impossible. At last, in a turmoil of exasperation, I uttered a loud shriek, and opened my eyes.

Sawyer!

What did it mean? Sawyer, my old black servant, buried long, long ago, yet bending over me there!

'Miserable apparition!' I cried, 'why do you come from your grave to torment one who already suffers past endurance?'

The apostrophe did its work, for the ghost

immediately vanished. But as I lay on my side with half-closed eyes, I saw a black curly head protruded from behind the partly-opened door. Further and further it was thrust, until the whole face became visible. The apparition seemed to be gazing intently at me, with a look in which astonishment and fright were mingled.

On a table at the bedside was a full wine-glass. It contained sherry. Gulping down the wine, I flung the empty glass with all my force at the staring face.

'Take that!' I savagely exclaimed.

The missile struck home, and, with a cry, the head was instantly withdrawn. This I thought rather strange. Could there be such a thing as a corporeal ghost, then? I concluded there must be such, though I had never before known an instance.

I have no clear recollection of what happened immediately afterwards. I felt very unwell, although the sherry had somewhat revived me. I realised to its full the misery of my position, and longed for Doctor Leete's appearance. Perhaps his cheerful optimism would medicine my trouble, or would he not rather straightway order me out of his house? And all the time my sweet Edith

was washing dirty linen, her arms buried in soapsuds, her becoming dress exchanged for that of a factory girl!

I was afterwards—though how long afterwards I cannot say—conscious of someone holding my hand, and of fingers applied to my wrist.

'Quite normal,' said a voice.

'Really!' answered another.

'Gentlemen,' I said to two strangers who were standing at the bedside, 'it gives me pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am, as you doubtless know, what people call the pilgrim of the nineteenth century, because I lay in a long trance, and only woke up the other day. Dear old Doctor Leete resuscitated me. You know him, of course?'

The gentlemen exchanged glances.

'Oh, yes,' assented he who had held my wrist. 'And now tell us more about yourself, Mr West, please.'

'Well,' I remarked, 'to speak in confidence, I think the Golden Age a fraud. What is your opinion? I am a gentleman born, yet they set me to work in the sewers! I get engaged to a charming girl, the very pink of delicacy and refinement, only to discover that she is a laundress!'

Again that exchange of glances.

'Oh, dear me!' I went on, 'the bridge of my nose feels so sore; it is from the pressure of the anticlast. I do so wish they would take down those delivery-tubes, and then one could go abroad without an anticlast. Gentlemen, the funeral customs of this age are simply ridiculous. Just fancy, it took five thousand people to bury Mrs Mauser!'

'Enough, Stanton?' murmured one of my visitors.

'Quite satisfied,' was the reply.

The gentlemen took a hasty farewell of me, and in a moment were gone.

. . . . . .

I had not seen Doctor Leete since leaving the labour-bureau. Where was he? I wondered, and Mrs Leete? Surely they could not be purposely keeping out of my way? I went on to the street in search of them, for I longed, above all, to confer with them about the curious turn things had taken. At last I discovered the doctor.

'Oh, doctor! doctor!' I exclaimed, running to him, 'what a sad day this has been for us!'

'Cheer up, Julian, my boy,' said he.

'You will be a Mic yet some day, I feel sure of it.'

'But Edith?' I gasped.

'Well, what of her?'

'Oh, doctor!' I sobbed, 'how can I claim her now?' Then, as anger got the mastery, 'Do you think I would ever let my wife be a laundress? Curse the age that can condemn beauty and refinement such as hers to that vile drudgery!'

Whereupon, boiling over with rage, forgetful of the good man's kindness to me and regardless of the consequences, I hissed out, 'Sir, I am a chrysochronosceptic!'

A look of pained astonishment came into Doctor Leete's face, and then the muscles set hard, and I became aware of the mistake I had made. In those features I read settled hostility to any pretensions of mine to Edith's hand. Keen, indeed, was my regret, and I wept bitter but unavailing tears.

. . . . . .

What was happening? What did those three men mean by daring to lay hands upon me? Where was I being carried to? With a feeling of stupefaction, I seemed to recognise my old home that had been burned

down so many, many years ago. Everything was there just as it had been left on the evening of my trance. A few minutes afterwards I realised that I was riding in a carriage with two persons whom I had never set eyes on before.

'Stop! Stop!' I cried. 'We cannot possibly get through the city. You forget the delivery-tubes.'

My *vis-à-vis* smiled, while the man sitting beside me said,—

'It's all right, sir. The tubes are down for repairs.'

'What an absurd idea!' I replied. Without doubt, I was dreaming, and should wake up directly to find myself in the music-room at Doctor Leete's, sitting with my arm round Edith in our favourite corner.

Shortly afterwards we were bowling down a street that reminded me curiously of State Street, as I knew it in the nineteenth century. Pointing to a large building at the corner of a block, I asked what it was.

'That's a bank,' answered one of my conductors, in a surprised voice.

'A bank?' I muttered. 'What tomfoolery

this is. Why, banks were abolished long ago. And where is the Elephant?'

'What Elephant?' was the reply.

But where was the use of interrogating idiots who didn't even know the dining-houses of their own city? I therefore resolved to maintain silence and thus preserve my dignity.

But when at length we drove up to a large building on the outskirts of the city, my curiosity was aroused, and I asked whether it was not the Massachusetts Art Gallery, for it looked remarkably like that structure.

'Yes, it is,' said the man who had answered my previous questions. 'We will get out here; there's something we want to show you.'

Oh, the weary, weary time I passed in that infernal place! There were people about me, coming and going, but their faces were those of strangers. I seemed somehow to have dropped out of that world already so familiar to me, the world of Doctor Leete and Edith, of delivery-tubes, and labour-bureaux and gorgeous guild clubs. Where, where was I? Oh, my beloved, should I never see your face again? And whenever

I put that question, a voice within me seemed to answer, 'Never! Never!'

Then a horrible thought occurred to me. What if I had fallen into yet another trance? What if the age whereinto I had been resuscitated by Doctor Leete had itself passed away?'

If it be so, let me die, I said. Let me share the lot of mortality, for it is divine.

I shall never forget that summer morning when, as I stood looking out of the window of my room, a startling conviction forced itself upon my mind. This was the first time I had felt any interest in outside things, and I was running my eye over the city which lay spread out in full view before me. To my intense astonishment my eye ranged over the Boston of the nineteenth century; there could be no doubt of the fact. I recognised several of the streets, as well as Commonwealth Avenue, where Edith Bartlett had lived. *Had* lived, I asked myself, or lived still? for I was in a whirl of agitation. There, too, lay the sinuous Charles, a silver thread traceable into the dim blue distance. And then my attention was drawn to a tree of peculiar shape skirting the roadway. This I recognised as the one opposite

to which my horse had once shied, causing me a nasty fall. In an instant the truth dawned upon me.

I was in the lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

At last I found myself re-established in my old home; but though feeling stronger, and moreover heartily thankful that the crisis had been successfully passed, I was still far from restored to robust health, for that vivid dream had indeed left behind it impressions of the most painful character. Of course I now knew exactly what had happened. My health had been unsatisfactory for some time previous to the dream, otherwise I should not have called in Doctor Pillsbury to alleviate the insomnia from which I suffered, and which, an unmistakable sign of neurotic trouble, had worn me down till I could scarcely recognise, in the ghastly face staring at me in the mirror, the ruddy countenance it had reflected only a few weeks before. Debilitated by long vigils, and the desperate remedy employed to assuage them, I was in no condition to bear any intellectual strain. In spite of this, however, I had

been studying with ever-growing fascination, not only those schemes of social reconstruction put forward academically by sundry great writers from Plato downwards; not those only, but the dangerous dreams also of modern fanatics, who, with eyes fixed on what is desirable alone, loudly proclaim to a restless and unhappy world the feasibility of their inflammatory panaceas. To crown all, I had just been reading that novel by the brilliant Frenchman, wherein a desiccated officer of the Great Napoleon wakes up, after immersion in a warm bath, to find himself a subject of that other Napoleon, whom a section of his countrymen never wearied of calling 'the Little.' Obviously my house had not been burnt down, for in that event the ventilation-tube, by means of which fresh air was introduced into my underground chamber, would also have been destroyed, and I could not possibly have survived under such circumstances. No, the whole thing was but a dream; vivid to a degree, and prolonged in consequence of the injunction I had given Sawyer after Doctor Pillsbury's substitute had brought me round, to leave me undisturbed till late in the afternoon. That, at least, was Sawyer's account of the

matter; though, for myself, I entirely fail to recall the circumstance.

Yet it must not be thought that those visions of the Golden Age were never reconstructed by 'the divine insanity of dreams.' Often and often some episode, ludicrous or delightful as the case might be, attended my slumber; once, indeed, all the scenes I have endeavoured to describe passed before me in rapid epitome. I saw men in anticlasts groping their way among the delivery-tubes; I followed a funeral procession with its hundreds of assistants; again, the Cock-Robin School in full swing came into view, and the Dustmen's Club, and all the curious experiences of the conversazione. I sat once more with Doctor Leete on his housetop, listening to encomiums on the Golden Age, and, what seems stranger still, agreeing with him that the stupendously complicated reforms alleged to have been effected were in reality perfectly simple; after which I put searching questions to him and received strange replies. Then Chisholm the artist came before me, and the histrionic bricklayer, and the cock-fighting sewer-man. After this, matters got mixed up; I found myself trying to enter

Doctor Leete's window, but the two fowls I carried had assumed gigantic proportions, and obstinately blocked the way. Then the Leetes and I were dining at the Elephant, and lo! the huge beast began moving away through space, whither none of us could conjecture, and when we reached the earth again, there was I before the labour-bureau; but no sooner was my sentence pronounced, than I discovered myself in a sewer alive with rats, whence, by some means, I escaped only to see Edith washing clothes with a sorrowful, wearied look on her face; and when I woke with a scream to find tears running down my cheeks, I agreed with the poet as to the insanity of my dream, though where its divine element came in I was at a complete loss to understand.

But by degrees the dreams became less vivid; they visited me more and more rarely, and at length ceased altogether. During this time my health had been gradually on the mend, until, about a fortnight after my release from the asylum, I regained the power of unbroken slumber. I was now as well as I had ever been, except that my mind still retained somewhat of the depression engendered by the unhappy experience

I had gone through. As for Edith Bartlett, I supposed all was now over between us. Of her or her family I had heard absolutely nothing; and though there had been no insanity in my family, so far as I knew, that is, and the doctors assured me I should not relapse without wantonly overtaxing myself, yet I purposely kept out of my friends' way. True, I entrusted one of the doctors, a mutual acquaintance to whom I had related my dream, and confessed everything leading up to it, with the task of making things clear to the Bartlett family; and this done, I could but wait the event.

In a more doleful mood than ordinary, I was one day sitting, with my face buried in my hands, trying to come to some determination about my future course. It was now several days since the doctor had executed his commission; and as it had so far proved fruitless, I had sorrowfully given up all hopes of Edith. A wish had therefore sprung up in my mind to leave the scene of so bitter a disappointment, and seek alleviation in foreign travel; and I was reviewing the *pros* and *cons* of advertising for a companion, when I felt a hand upon my shoulder. I started up.

'Julian!'

'Edith!'

Yes, it was she indeed, but so like, so very like, the Edith of my dream; for a moment, in fact, I could not shake off the conviction that I was again dreaming. Thank God, it was no dream. Thank God, my life was not to be the bitter broken thing those fits of depression had seemed to bear the prophecy of. And when, after giving us a few minutes to ourselves, Edith's father and mother joined us, I saw from their cordial greeting that all difficulties had been smoothed away.

And what shall I say of Edith, my charming bride, who had been restored to me, as it were, from the grave itself? Truly I can affirm that, as I watched unfolding day by day her winning graces and perfect accomplishment, I was astonished to find her growing more and more like that other Edith who, amid the freer conditions of the world I had imagined, had displayed to me before marriage those profounder traits now, in response to the conventions of our society, hidden from the mere lover. Before our union, in fact, I had but little real insight into my wife's

character; and, as is the case with lovers, made up for the deficiency in my knowledge by resorting to imagination, seizing here a hint, a stray opinion or sentiment there, as material wherewith to assist me in completing a portrait presented only in outline. This imaginary portraiture it was that had brought into my dreams the other Edith, with her debonair abandon, her bewitching mirth, her unrestrained tears. Sad indeed is his lot who wakes from the dream of love to a harsh and discordant reality; for me, and I speak with heartfelt thankfulness, it has been decreed otherwise.

But my dream? Could it fade utterly away into the limbo of things forgotten —leave in its wake no stirring of the waters whereover it had been wafted? Ah, no! It had found me a careless votary of hedonism; a mere absorbent of happiness, without that desire to reflect and radiate it which alone can stamp the possessor of wealth with the image and superscription of true humanity. I had now learnt to look on duty as the crown of life, rather than on pleasure; the gems of self-sacrifice must glow embedded in refined metal before the crown be worth

a man's wearing. Henceforward I discarded those vain lucubrations, veritable nightmares of the soul, that had exercised so powerful a fascination over me. It was not, I determined, reconstruction on new lines that the world needed; it was the creation of a higher ideal among the toiling masses, and the suggestion of an unrealisable one seemed to me the invention of all others best calculated to strangle such an ideal in its birth. To the realisation of this aim it was that I decided henceforth to devote myself. And why should I complain though the ground be stubborn, and the ploughing of each furrow carry its record of heavy travail and weariness? I have beside me a radiant presence, ever stimulating me to fresh ardour, ever prophesying of a harvest time when, beneath glorious skies, the grain I am helping to prepare the ground for will be garnered by emancipated mankind. This, of course, I shall not live to see; but the conviction that my labour will not be altogether in vain is enough for me. Yes, I am satisfied.

THE END

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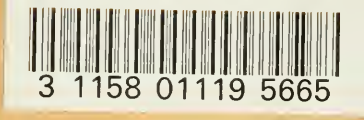

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